How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

Original Story
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Art
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Character Design
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6

How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

Volume Six

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How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

WHAT THE HELL...? THIS GAME IS CRAP!

CHAPTER 27

TOMO-YA!

HEY, TOMOYA! COME ON!

YUSSA (SHAKE)
ゆっさ

YUSSA
ゆっさ

...MM.

...HNN?

CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

YOSHIHIKO KAMIGOU
TOMOYA'S CLASSMATE AND OTAKU FRIEND

HEY, YOSHIHIKO. SO WE FINALLY MEET IN THE COMIC VERSION, HUH?

HUH?

WE MEET EVERY DAY. ARE YOU STILL ASLEEP? WERE YOU DREAMING ABOUT...

...ANOTHER DIMEN-SION OR SOME-THING?

FUAAAA (YAWN)

...OH, GOOD TIMING, YOSHI-HIKO.

AS PUNISHMENT FOR ROBBING ME OF PRECIOUS SLEEP TIME, I BESTOW UPON YOU THE HONOR OF BUYING ME A CURRY BUN FOR LUNCH.

MAN, I CAN'T TELL WHETHER TO BE PROUD OR ASHAMED OF THIS QUEST.

I HAVEN'T SLEPT EVEN AFTER FINISHING THE ALPHA VERSION, SO I KEEP NODDING OFF.

ACTUALLY, YOU'VE BEEN SLEEPING RIGHT THROUGH CLASS ALL WEEK!

WELL, I'VE KINDA HAD MY HANDS FULL LATELY.

YOU'VE BEEN SLEEPING LIKE A CHAMP SINCE FIRST PERIOD.

AH...

YOUR THING FOR THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL!

IT STARTS TOMORROW, REMEMBER?

...FOR WHAT?

JUST KIDDING. I GET IT! THERE'S LOTS TO WORK ON AGAIN THIS YEAR, RIGHT?

?

NO WONDER NO ONE GAVE ME ANY GRIEF THIS WEEK FOR SLEEPING.

WHAT THE HELL...? IS IT THAT TIME ALREADY?

NO. I'M NOT DOING ANY-THING THIS YEAR.

OH PLEASE! I CAN HELP YOU WITH ANYTHING YOU NEED!

TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE PLAN-NING!

UH, AS I JUST SAID ...

HAVING THE SAME ANIME SCREEN-INGS AS LAST YEAR WOULD BE LAME.

KNOWING YOU, TOMOYA, YOU'RE THINKING UP ANOTHER STUNNING SURPRISE, AREN'T YOU?

GUI

WELL, ANYWAY!

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO WHAT THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL HAS TO OFFER!

GUI (PUSH)

OH. HUH?

YEAH.

HE'S ALL OVER THE PLACE!

RUMOR HAS IT THAT THIS YEAR'S MISS TOYOGASAKI COMPETITION IS GONNA BE A CLOSE CALL.

ALTHOUGH, WITHOUT DEFENDING CHAMPION SAWAMURA, YOU CAN'T CALL THE WINNER THE TRUE QUEEN.

O-OHH...

YEAH, I REMEMBER LAST YEAR'S WINNER UP ON THE STAND WITH HER BLOND HAIR AND GOLD CROWN...

...WEARING HER PUBLIC FACE AND A FAINT SMILE.

HM?

OH YEAH, WHAT ABOUT YOU?

YEAH. THREE IN A ROW WOULD BE BAD. IF THAT HAPPENED, SHE'D PROBABLY BE DOOMED TO FAILURE FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE.

ANYONE WOULD THINK SO.

BUT IF SAWAMURA WERE TO RUN THIS YEAR AND NEXT, SHE'D PULL OFF A THREE-PEAT, AND THAT WOULD GET BORING.

IT'S TRICKY.

REAL GIRLS ONLY, NO BODY PILLOWS.

...IF THAT'S EVEN AN OPTION, THEN DON'T CONSIDER ME BEING THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE!

WHO'S GONNA BE YOUR PARTNER AT THE CLOSING FOLK DANCE?

AT THIS SCHOOL, THAT'S THE SAME AS SAYING, "PLEASE GO OUT WITH ME," RIGHT?

BUT HAVEN'T YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT YOU'LL DO IF A GIRL ASKS YOU?

HE'S BOUNCING OFF THE WALLS!

I KNOW, RIGHT!? THAT REMINDS ME, THE DRAMA CLUB'S PUTTING ON THE SAME PLAY AS LAST YEAR TOO.

GUI

GUI (PUSH)

GUI

WELL, THAT'S... THE KIND OF TRADITION THAT LEADS TO BLOOD BEING SPILLED!

O-OH...

PEOPLE EVEN CALLED IT A "LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE."

SEEMS LIKE IT WAS WILDLY POPULAR LAST YEAR.

...HANG ON. THE SAME PLAY ...?

...IS THAT THE WRITER'S TOO BUSY TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A NEW SCRIPT THIS TIME...

MOST LIKELY, THE REAL REASON THEY'RE DOING IT AGAIN...

THERE'S EVEN A RUMOR THAT THE SCRIPT WAS ACTUALLY GHOSTWRITTEN BY A FAMOUS AUTHOR.

DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S TRUE OR NOT THOUGH.

IT'S JUST YOU ALWAYS SEEM TOO SLEEPY TO TALK.

TON (TAP)

I CAN'T SLEEEEP! I HAVEN'T BEEN GETTING ANY REST ALL WEEK!

TON

FEELS LIKE IT'S BEEN A WHILE, KATOU.

BUT I'VE SEEN YOU EVERY DAY.

OH, SO YOU'RE SAYING YOU'VE BEEN WATCH-ING ME SIX HOURS A DAY?

YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO MEM-ORIZE A LINE THAT SIMPLE! QUIT WITH THE CHEAT SHEETS!

ER, HANG ON A SECOND. I'M SURE THE RIGHT REACTION IS ON PAGE THREE...

"Y-YOU IDIOT! WHY WOULD I BE WATCHING YOU!?"

!

FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF YOU IN SCHOOL, YOU'VE BEEN SLEEPING SIX HOURS A DAY.

YOU FINISHED THE GAME, RIGHT?

UMM.

SO...

HM?

...W-WELL, I'VE GOT YEARS ON YOU WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A GAMER.

IT TOOK ME UNTIL YESTERDAY.

OH, THAT WAS FAST!

YEAH, I COMPLETED IT ON MONDAY MORNING.

...
QUIRA (GLANCE)

DID YOU PLAY IT THROUGH TO THE END?

WELL, JUST THE ALPHA ANYWAY.

SHE ACTUALLY PLAYED IT...

IT DOES TAKE EXPERIENCE, HUH?

SHE REALLY IS TRYING TO MAKE THIS GAME TURN OUT WELL.

...BUT YOU'D NEVER GUESS HOW SERIOUS SHE IS FROM LOOKING AT HER. THAT EXPRESSION ISN'T HELPING EITHER.

...UNLESS YOU PLAYED IT?

...DID YOU FIGURE OUT THE THING YOU COULDN'T KNOW...

SO, THEN...

I SEE... SO YOU NOTICED IT TOO, AKI-KUN.

HUH!?

.....

.....YEAH.

YES.....

WHA—!?

YOU TOO, KATOU...?

SO YOU GOT THERE TOO, HUH...? THAT "SOMETHING" HIDDEN IN THE SCRIPT THAT WE COULDN'T WORK OUT WITHOUT PLAYING...

ZAAAA (PWSSH)

HII

KATOU'S OTAKU POWERS HAVE BLOSSOMED.

SO WHAT WILL YOU DO, AKI-KUN?

YOU NEED TO GIVE HER AN ANSWER, RIGHT?

...I KNOW THAT.

I SEE.

SO YOU'VE MADE A DECI-SION...

YOU'LL ANSWER KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI.

YES.

AFTER ALL, I'M THE CIRCLE'S REP AND THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GAME'S PRODUCTION ...

PLUS, YOU'RE A BOY.

OH.

YEP.

KO (CLICK)

SO...

AKI-KUN...

MEGURI OR RURI—

WHO WOULD YOU PICK?

KATOU
...

NEITHER.

AND BOTH.

I UNDER-STOOD... I FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT!

ER, UHH... JUST A SECOND ...

.....

HUH?

FLAT

SHUSHUN (DEFLATE)

I'M SAYING THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT WHICH HEROINE YOU CHOOSE.

THIS ISN'T A PROBLEM OF BINARY SELECTION.

"YOU— BOTH OF YOU— ARE MY WINGS." IS THAT RIGHT?

ENOUGH WITH THE CHEAT SHEET, I SAID...

UMM, COULD YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE MORE?

NO! I ARRIVED AT A MUCH MORE INTRINSIC, MAJOR FLAW IN THE GAME!

YIKES~! I JUST HEARD SOME-THING AWFUL!

...HOW SHOULD I PUT THIS...? OKAY.

WELL ...

WHY IS SHE SO PUT OFF? I GAVE HER A SINCERE, COMPLETELY HONEST ANSWER FROM THE HEART.

WHAT THE HECK DO YOU MEAN!?

...UMM, COULD YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE MORE?

... ERR...

...THAT'S NOT ALL YOU NEED TO GET ALONG WELL IN THIS WORLD.

...AND YOU MAY HAVE KEEN INSIGHTS AS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GAME'S PRODUCTION, BUT...

AS THE CIRCLE'S REP, YOUR OPINION MAY BE CORRECT, AKI-KUN...

KACHI (CLICK)

KACHI

I THOUGHT HARD FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS ABOUT WHAT TO DO...

...AND I THOUGHT THAT I'D HIT ON THE BEST OPTION FOR THE CIRCLE AT THE END OF IT...

KACHI

KACHI

WHAT THE HECK!? WHAT'S WITH YOUR REACTION?

WHAAAT!?

EVEN IF IT'S COMPLETELY BIASED...

I THINK YOU SHOULD JUST GO IN THE DIRECTION YOU THINK IS RIGHT, OKAY?

NEVER MIND.

WAI—! HOLD IT—! WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!?

I NEED TO THINK ABOUT MY FUTURE NOW.

I'LL BE OFF, THEN.

IT'S FINE. EVEN IF I COMPLAIN THAT THE LEAD CHARACTER IS USELESS, AND DUMB, AND GARBAGE, AND THE WORST, I'M SURE THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO PROBABLY WILL UNDERSTAND HIM. YEAH, A FEW.

WHY THE HELL IS THIS HAPPENING ...?

POTSUUUN (ALONE)

ポツ ——— ン

...HEY!

BANNER: TOYOGASAKI SCHOOL FESTIVAL

豊ケ崎学園祭

AND THEN ... ...IT WAS THE SCHOOL FESTI-VAL.

GAYA (CHATTER)

GAYA

豊ケ崎学園祭

HEY, TOMOYA!

WHAT TIME'S YOUR SCREENING THIS YEAR?

IT'S NOT IN THE PAMPHLET ANYWHERE.

HEY, ARE YOU OKAY? YOUR FACE...

I TOLD YOU, I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING THIS YEAR...

I'M SORRY, BUT I'M IN A HURRY.

FOUR ALL-NIGHTERS IS REALLY TOUGH... I'M IN NO CONDITION TO ENJOY ANY FESTIVAL...

WITH HER, IF YOU'RE NOT PAYING ATTENTION, SHE'S LIABLE TO DISAPPEAR INTO THE WOODWORK.

TODAY'S THE ONE DAY I HAVEN'T SEEN HER AROUND AT ALL.

HUH? OTAKKUN? HE ISN'T HANGING OUT WITH MEGUMI!

?

ANYWAY, RIGHT NOW, I NEED TO FIND...

...HER.

...IS THIS SEAT FREE?

...YES.

IT'S ONLY BEEN TWO WEEKS, BUT IT FEELS LIKE IT'S BEEN AGES.

IN-DEED.

YES.

IN-DEED.

LONG TIME NO SEE.

!

EVEN THOUGH THIS IS GOING TO BE A REPEAT PERFORMANCE, I FIGURED YOU WOULDN'T MISS SEEING YOUR BABY UP ON A STAGE THIS BIG, UTAHA-SENPAI.

YOU DID WELL TO FIND ME HERE.

...
Harmony's Rhapsody.

Thank you for your patience. The Drama Club will now present the play...

Script by Utaha Kasumigaoka. Directed by...

...IS THAT RIGHT?

WE WATCHED THIS TOGETH-ER LAST YEAR TOO, DIDN'T WE?

SASA (SWISH)

COME TO THINK OF IT...

FLI- (FLICK)

WHAT?

THEY HAD A HARD TIME. THE LINES WERE SO NUMEROUS AND THE SCRIPT SO MASSIVE THAT IT MADE THE CLUB PRESIDENT CRY.

AS ALWAYS, THIS PLAY IS REALLY INTENSE RIGHT OFF THE BAT.

BUT SENPAI MADE THEM REDO IT THIRTY TIMES, AND THREE OF THE CLUB MEMBERS RAN OFF AND QUIT IN THE END.

THAT DAY, THEY RE-HEARSED THREE HOURS FOR A SCENE THAT WOULD ONLY BE FIVE MINUTES ON STAGE.

LAST YEAR, I SAW THEM RE-HEARSE ONCE.

THAT'S PROBABLY NOT THE ONLY THING THAT MADE THE DRAMA CLUB WEEP.

NO GOOD .....!

AS SENPAI MUTTERED ANGRILY...

...SHE STUBBORNLY KEPT HAVING THEM DO IT OVER AND OVER UNTIL THE SCENE PLAYED OUT AS SHE ENVISIONED.

EVEN WHEN THE CLUB MEMBERS GRUMBLED IN PROTEST, SHE NEVER WAVERED OR APOLO-GIZED...

BUT STILL...

...THE SCRIPT REALLY HOLDS UP.

...THAT'S THE STRENGTH OF THE ACTORS.

IF YOU LIKE THE SHOW, IT'S THE DRAMA CLUB YOU SHOULD BE PRAISING.

...WELL?

HUH?

YOU HAD..... SOMETHING TO SAY, DIDN'T YOU?

THAT'S WHY YOU CAME HERE TO SEE ME, RIGHT?

BUT NOW'S NOT...

!

CHIRA (GLANCE)

GATA (SHAKE)

GATA

GATA

IT'S FINE. I'VE SEEN THIS PLENTY OF TIMES.

BESIDES... UNTIL I GET YOUR ANSWER, RINRI-KUN...

...I CAN'T FOCUS ANYWAY.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. I'VE PREPARED MYSELF.

IF YOU'RE GOING TO SENTENCE ME TO DEATH, JUST GET IT OVER WITH.

HUH ...?

OF COURSE. FOR A CREATOR, HAVING THEIR CREATION NOT MAKE IT OUT INTO THE WORLD IS PROBABLY MORE PAINFUL THAN ANY PHYSICAL WOUND.

A REWRITE... IT HAS TO BE DONE OVER.

WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE, RINRI-KUN? THE FIRST VERSION OR THE SECOND?

MEGURI? OR... RURI?

KUH .....!

IT'S ALL MY FAULT.

YAKISOBA

YUM!

TAKOYAKI

SO, THEN WHY ...?

BOTH VERSIONS WERE DOWN-RIGHT DIVINE.

AS GAMES, BOTH SCENARIOS HAVE A FATAL FLAW.

THEY'RE NO GOOD AS GAMES... WHEN YOU TURN THEM INTO ONE, THEY'RE TOTALLY BORING.

...GH!

GWGL (GRIP)

THEY REALLY ARE GOD-LIKE.

IF ONLY THEY WERE NOVELS AND NOT A KAMI-SHIBAI GAL GAME...

...THE NOVELIST UTAKO KASUMI. RIGHT NOW, UTAHA-SENPAI, YOU'RE ...

YOU'RE NOT QUITE AT UTAHA KASUMIGAOKA, THE GAME SCRIPT WRITER.

AS IT STANDS, NO MATTER HOW LOVELY THE WRITING IS, OUR GAME WILL HAVE NO CHANCE AGAINST PRO GAME DEVELOPERS.

...I HAVE TO HACK YOUR SCENARIOS APART.

SO, I'M SORRY, BUT...

.....

U-UTAHA-SENPAI ...!?

?

!... SEE.

—SAID IS TRUE, ISN'T IT?

HUH?

ONCE AGAIN, I'VE— HAVEN'T I...?

AND THIS TIME, YOU HAVE A GOOD EXCUSE...

UMM, EXCUSE ME, UTAHA-SENPAI ...?

YOU'RE SPEAKING IN FRAG-MENTS, AND THE WORDS I CAN HEAR DON'T SOUND TOO GOOD...

I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOU, YOU— SON OF A— ...HOW DARE YOU— MY—!

RINRI!

EITHER SPIT IT ALL OUT OR SAY NOTHING! NO, HANG ON! I PICK THE LATTER!

IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO USE "-KUN," PLEASE AT LEAST CALL ME "TOMOYA"!

EHHH-HHH!?

COMPLAINING ABOUT MY STORIES, HUH!? YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE!

IN THAT CASE, I'M GOING TO POUND YOU INTO DUST RIGHT NOW!

END

CHAPTER 28

豊ケ崎学園祭

A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE OPENING OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL

BANNER: TOYOGASAKI SCHOOL FESTIVAL

UM, I'M SORRY FOR ASKING YOU TO SEE ME SO EARLY...

...KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI.

...IT'S FINE.

ALL I'VE GOT PLANNED FOR TODAY IS SEEING THE DRAMA CLUB'S PLAY THIS AFTER-NOON.

UMMM, ABOUT THE ANSWER AKI-KUN IS GOING TO GIVE YOU ABOUT THE SCENARIOS ...

HE'LL TELL ME HIMSELF. YOU DON'T NEED TO.

WELL, THAT COULD LEAD TO ALL SORTS OF HEADACHES, SOOO...

WELL, YOU SEE ...

...UH, HMM ...

...WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

FIRST OF ALL, PLEASE LET ME APOLO-GIZE.

I'M SORRY, KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI.

WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO BUTT IN ON PRIVATE BUSINESS BETWEEN ME AND RINRI-KUN?

...WHY WOULD YOU NEED TO APOLOGIZE, KATOU-SAN?

THE THING IS...

WELL, IT'S 'COS...

OH!

SO THIS IS PERSONAL.

WHICH OF THE SCENARIOS IS BETTER IS SIMPLY A PRETEXT FOR SOMETHING ELSE.

.....KUH!

I'M GOING TO POUND YOU INTO DUST RIGHT NOW!

...PROBABLY TOWARD AN ANSWER COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE YOU WANT.

HE'S GONE IN AN UNEX-PECTED DIREC-TION...

I'M PUTTING IN ALL MY PENT-UP PERSONAL ANGER FROM THIS PAST YEAR!

I WILL SHUT DOWN ALL YOUR ASSER-TIONS!

YOU'LL BE SO CORNERED THAT YOU'LL HAVE NO HOPE OF RECOVER-ING AS A CREATOR!

WHOA, SENPAI! HEY!?

NOW, BRACE YOURSELF, RINRI-KUN...

SHALL I BEGIN?

KI (GLARE)

ZA (ZSH)

...FINE.

THEN YOU'RE OKAY WITH ME PICKING A FIGHT WITH YOU?

ACTUALLY, I'VE ALREADY PUT TOGETHER A BIT OF A REWRITE GUIDE.

HAVE A LOOK AT THIS.

"ISSUES WITH UTAKO KASUMI'S NEW GAME SCENARIOS"?

...WHAT IS THIS?

WELL, BASICALLY, YOU STILL HAVEN'T MESHED YOUR LITERARY STYLE WITH GAME WRITING, UTAHA-SENPAI.

...!

YOU NEED TO WRITE A FEW GAMES AND THEN THROW AWAY SOME OF YOUR PRIDE AS A NOVELIST.

THAT'S HOW YOU BECOME A FIRST-RATE GAME WRITER.

I'M NOT EXAGGERATING.

KH ...!

YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT EXPERIENCE. YOUR PROBLEM IS PRIDE...

YOU SOLD AS SOON AS YOU DEBUTED AND WERE WELL REGARDED TO BOOT, SO YOU DON'T LIKE TO HEAR OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS...

GUGU (CLENCH)

KACHA

KACHA (RATTLE)

...BESIDES YOUR EDITOR, MACHIDA-SAN, THAT IS.

GOKU (GULP)

...YOU CON-SUMER PIG ...!

GLARE

YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE, TALKING DOWN TO ME LIKE THAT...

...HOW CAN I KNOW UNLESS I PLAY IT?

ARE YOU SAYING YOU'RE BETTER THAN GAME WRITERS? ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT YOU'VE WRITTEN A MORE ENGAGING GAME THAN THEM?

NOBODY LOOKS TO ENJOY THOSE THINGS AS GAMES, DO THEY?

BUT THESE NOVEL GAMES AREN'T VERY GAME-LIKE TO BEGIN WITH...

!

THAT'S RIGHT. TRY IT! PLAY IT AND COMPARE IT TO OTHER GAMES!

THEN YOU'LL UNDER-STAND HOW CRAPPY OUR GAME IS!

DON'T UNDER-ESTIMATE NOVEL GAMES! DON'T TALK CRAP WHEN YOU HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT THE APPEAL OF DIGITAL KAMI-SHIBAI!

BAN (BAM)

IS THAT WHAT YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THEM ALL ALONG!? HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY MAKE A GOOD GAME LIKE THAT?

KUH!

YOU TAKE THAT BACK ...!

NO WAY! YOU THINK I CAN STAY SILENT WITH YOU LOOKING DOWN ON NOVEL GAMES?

BUT AREN'T YOU DOING THE SAME TO ME RIGHT NOW, TOMOYA-KUN!?

I DEVOTED SO MANY DAYS TO WRITING THOSE SCRIPTS FOR YOU— UNTIL I WAS SICK TO MY STOMACH!

SHE JUST CALLED ME "TOMOYA-KUN"...

I TOOK THAT JOB SERIOUSLY ...

SHE'S IN TOTAL SINCERITY MODE!

PLEASE DON'T REJECT THEM NOW...!

UM, KASUMIGAOKA-SAN? EXCUSE ME...

TSUN (POKE)

TSUN

DON'T INTERRUPT ME. WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION HERE.

EVEN SO, WE HAVE TO KEEP PUSHING AHEAD...

YOU ALWAYS SAY THAT RESULTS, NOT EFFORTS, ARE WHAT MATTER, RIGHT?

IF UTAHA-SENPAI WINS THIS, OUR FRIENDSHIP WILL NEVER RECOVER.

AND IF I WIN, IT'LL RUIN HER CONFIDENCE AT WORST.

IF YOU WISH FOR EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BIT OF SUCCESS FOR OUR CLASS, WE'RE HOPING YOU MIGHT LEAVE IMMEDIATELY ...

.....

Maid cafe

3-C

Menu

Drinks

•Blended Coffe

•Iced

BANNER: TOYOGASAKI SCHOOL FESTIVAL

WELL?

HOW WAS PLAYING THE GAME YOU WROTE?

豊崎学園祭

...

YOU CAN'T TELL ANY-THING FROM A GAME THAT'S THIS UNFIN-ISHED.

...YOU'RE NOT EVEN AT THE LEVEL OF DOUJIN GAME WRITERS.

RIGHT NOW, SENPAI, NEVER MIND COMMERCIAL GAME WRITERS...

IT'S AS COMPLETE AS CAN BE.

I TRIED LOTS OF FINE-TUNING... BUT IT DIDN'T HELP.

IF IT WERE MORE FULLY PRODUCED... IT WOULD COMPLETELY CHANGE THE FEEL OF THE GAME.

THE TEXT IS COMPLETE IN A BAD SENSE.

THE WORDS CONVEY EVERY-THING.

IT'S BECOME A NOVEL.

AS IT IS, IT DOESN'T NEED ART OR MUSIC. WHATEVER YOU ADD WON'T GIVE IT ANY NEW ENERGY.

...THIS IS NO DIFFERENT FROM READING IT ON PAPER.

BUT THIS WAS MY FAULT AS THE DIRECTOR.

MINE, FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO BRING UTAHA-SENPAI'S POWER TO LIFE IN THE GAME WORLD...

SO THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO FEEL DOWN ABOUT IT NOW.

I'M THE ONE WHO NEEDS TO SERIOUSLY REFLECT. I'VE LOST TO IORI.

AFTER PLAYING ROUGE EN ROUGE'S TRIAL VERSION, I GET WHY HE'S SO SURE OF HIMSELF.

I'VE LEARNED THAT HE HAD EVERYTHING RIGHT AS A DIRECTOR.

THAT'S WHAT IORI DID.

YOU HAVE TO REALLY LOOK AT WHAT THE CREATORS YOU BELIEVE IN HAVE MADE...

...AND ONLY ONCE YOU'VE DETERMINED THAT THEY'VE PRODUCED SOMETHING WONDERFUL CAN YOU SAY YOU REALLY TRUST YOUR STAFF.

IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING BLIND FAITH IN YOUR STAFF.

I'M... SUCH AN IDIOT.

TO THINK THAT DOUJIN EXPLOITER WOULD FACE HIS PROJECT WITH EVEN MORE ENTHUSIASM THAN ME...

THEN HE CAREFULLY CHECKED THE CONTENT AND PROVIDED ADEQUATE DIRECTION UNTIL THE GAME THEY PRODUCED DESERVED HIS BELIEF IN IT.

HE BROUGHT IN A WRITER AND A WHOLE TEAM THAT HAD GAME EXPERIENCE.

THERE'S STILL TIME TO REDO IT.

WE STILL HAVE A CHANCE TO FIX OUR FAULTS.

BUT...

...EVEN SO...

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO RIGHT NOW IS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE'S A NEED TO FIX IT, UTAHA-SENPAI!

NO.

I WON'T ...

I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THAT.

KYUMU (PURSE)

IF I DO...

...THEN THAT MEANS YOU DON'T ACCEPT ME, TOMOYA-KUN.

...YOUR TRUST ...

YOUR EXPECTA-TIONS...

IT'LL MEAN I FAILED TO LIVE UP TO THEM.

UTAHA
...
...SENPAI...
...YOU DON'T NEED ME!
IT'LL BE THE SAME AS YOU SAYING...

HOW COULD I NOT NEED YOU!?

EVEN NOW, I NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER!

AND I'M GOING TO NEED YOU FOR A LONG, LONG TIME!

DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I NEED YOU, UTAHA-SENPAI!?

EVEN THEN...

GIRI (GRIT)

...PLEASE SAY YOU'LL FIX IT.

GAGA
GAGA
GAGA
GAGA
GOOD...
AND NEXT, I'LL PRINT THIS OUT...
SEVERAL HOURS LATER
BACK HOME
AM I BEING TOO NOISY?

KURA (NOD)

...THEN I'LL HAVE TO WORK ON THIS DOCUMENT AND CALMLY MAKE MY CASE ABOUT THE ISSUES AGAIN...

IF SHE WON'T AGREE TO THE REWRITE...

...

UTAHA-SENPAI HASN'T SAID A WORD SINCE THEN.

CAN'T SLEEP!

I NEED TO GET THE OKAY FROM UTAHA-SENPAI TO REVISE THE SCENARIO!

GO (GLUG)

GO

GO

IT'S PAST MID-NIGHT... TODAY'S DAY TWO OF THE FESTI-VAL...

...AND A WEEK OF MY BEING UP EVERY NIGHT...

...NN?

↓YAWWWN↑

OH, YOU'RE UP.

HEY, I NEVER WENT TO SLEEP.

I GAVE IT A ONCE OVER...

ERR, NOW, HOW FAR DID I GET?

URR...

OH. SORRY, UTAHA-SENPA...

...!?

MORN-ING, RINRI-KUN.

I'M SORRY TO DO THIS JUST AFTER YOU'VE WOKEN UP, BUT COULD I SPEAK TO YOU?

10 DERA (FWAP)

7

THIS IS WHAT I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT TYPING...

HUH? THIS IS ...?

PLEASE TAKE A LOOK AT THIS FIRST.

...NOT TO MENTION ERRORS, OMISSIONS, AND MIS-USAGES.

I CORRECTED IT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, SO SHALL WE MAKE THIS THE BASIS OF OUR DISCUSSION?

THERE ARE PARTS OF YOUR OPINION THAT I STILL CAN'T AGREE WITH AND PARTS THAT ARE CLEARLY WRONG...

...

SENPAI... THIS IS...

U-UM...

...AND GETTING IT DOWN TO THIRTY TOOK TWO YEARS.

WRITING IS A ROUGH BUSINESS.

MACHIDA-SAN HAD OVER THREE HUNDRED CORRECTIONS ON MY FIRST COMMERCIAL PUBLICATION ...

THIS IS NOTHING.

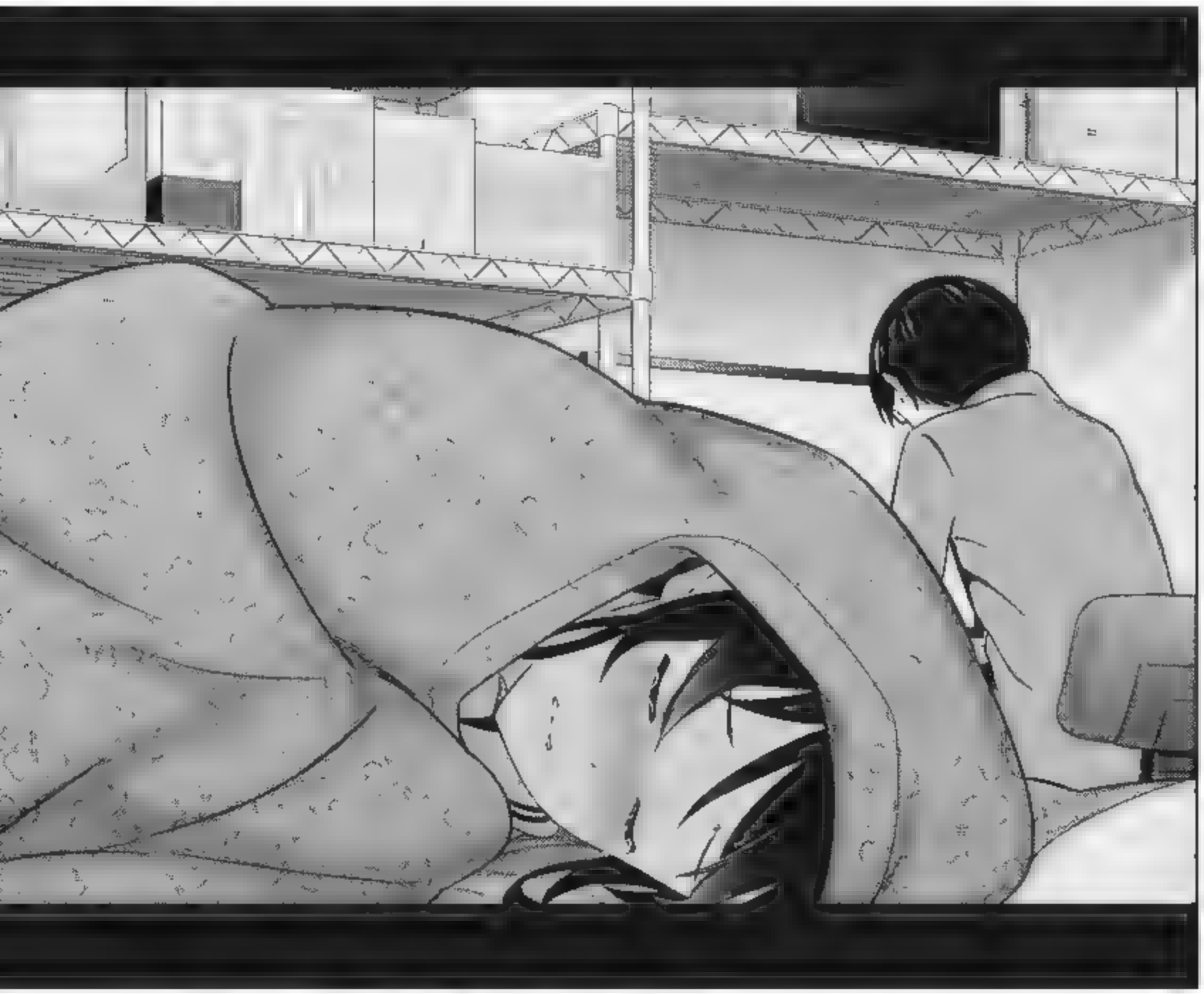
UTAHA-SENPAI'S MARKED THE WHOLE THING UP WITH RED INK...!

SHE DID ALL THIS WORK ...?

ALL WHILE I DOZED OFF FOR A BIT...

SO HOW COULD I EXPECT NO REWRITES ON MY VERY FIRST GAME SCRIPT?
NOTHING EVER WORKS OUT THAT PERFECTLY.

OH...!



LET'S GET STARTED, RINRI-KUN...

THANK YOU, UTAHA-SENPAI ooo

HA HA ...!

IF WE DON'T, SAWAMURA-SAN WILL BLAME OUR DEFEAT ON THE SCRIPT.

SHALL WE AT LEAST MAKE SOMETHING BETTER THAN ROUGE EN ROUGE'S SCENARIO?

WHAT THE HELL!? AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN "ANOTHER"!?

WELL, I WON'T MAKE IT TOO HARSH. YOU DID GIVE ME A SMALL ADVANCE.

I TOOK ANOTHER PHOTO OF YOU SLEEPING. IT WAS QUITE SATISFYING.

...I'LL BE READY!

YOU'RE GOING TO SUFFER A PUNISHMENT FOR —ING ME.

ALSO... ONCE THIS IS OVER, I WANT YOU TO PREPARE YOURSELF.

WHAT THE HELL!?

WAS THIS FROM OUR HOTEL STAY!?

NOW, THEN! LET'S BEGIN OUR DISCUSSION.

AND DON'T BE ***STANDING AT ATTENTION*** THE WHOLE TIME. WE HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER CLOSELY FROM HERE ON AFTER ALL.

STOP SAYING STUFF LIKE THAT!

MORNING TOGETHER♡

2人の朝なう♡

■END■

ﾋﾟﾛﾛﾛﾛﾛ

MUUU (BUZZ)

HUH!?

CHAPTER 29

YOU WANT THREE TRUE ENDINGS?

...ARE YOU STUPID?

I AM.

TON

TON

TON (TOK)

YOU TRULY ARE! A HUGE IDIOT!

ON TOP OF THE MASSIVE REWRITE OF THE EXISTING SCRIPTS, NOW YOU WANT TO ADD A NEW ONE!?

AND WHAT'S MORE, YOU WANT IT ALL DONE BY TOMORROW...

HAAAH...

BUT IF I DON'T GET IT TO ERIRI BY MONDAY, THEN THE EVENT GRAPHICS WON'T BE READY IN TIME.

YOU CAN'T JUST SAY THAT WITH SUCH A LAID-BACK EXPRES-SION!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO DO AS MUCH AS WE CAN WITHIN OUR TIME LIMITS.

THE DOWNSTREAM PROCESS IS MORE KEY THAN THE ARTISTRY OR OURSELVES.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN COLLABORATIVE WORK IS THE DEADLINES.

UTAHA-SENPAI, THIS IS A GAME SCRIPT REVISION, OKAY?

FIDDLING WITH THIS MUCH NOW WILL TAKE TWO WEEKS OR...

BUT THAT'S ...

ALL I CAN SAY FOR SURE IS THAT WE DEFINITELY WON'T HAVE ANYTHING, MASTERPIECE OR OTHERWISE, IF WE DON'T.

DO YOU THINK YOU CAN CREATE A MASTERPIECE LIKE THAT?

.....

AFTER ALL, UTAHA-SENPAI PROBABLY WON'T HAVE ANY ROOM IN HER SCHEDULE FOR US...

ALSO... IF THIS PROJECT ...

...ISN'T OUT IN TIME FOR WINTER COMIKET, THEN IT WILL NEVER BE RELEASED.

IS...

...THAT SO?

THAT'S WHY YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR THIS ONE DECISION.

KI (GLARE)

BUT, RINRI-KUN...

...HOWEVER MUCH I STRIVE TO MEET THE DEADLINE, IT'S PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO DO THIS ALONE.

DOKLIN

DOKLIN

DOKLIN

THE STORY YOU'RE PUSHING SO HARD FOR. THAT'S IT.

DOKLIN (BADUM)

JUST DO THE THIRD SCENARIO.

WRITE IT...

TOMÖYA-KUN.

CLOCK: SATURDAY

WELL, ALL THE FORKS COME IN THE LAST HALF, SO IT'S NOT THAT MUCH WORK.

BY THE WAY, SENPAI ...

...HOW MUCH SHOULD I WRITE?

EVEN IF I DID, THE QUALITY WOULD BE AWFUL, AND WE'D NEVER PICK UP ON ALL THE MISTAKES.

HOW COULD I?

S-SO, THEN, HOW CAN I...?

RINRI-KUN.

!?

IN TERMS OF PLAY TIME, I WONDER IF ABOUT HALF A LIGHT NOVEL WOULD CONVERT TO ONE HOUR? EASY ENOUGH.

AT THAT SPEED, YOU COULD WRITE ONE VOLUME IN THREE DAYS!

UTAHA-SENPAI, CAN YOU REALLY DO THAT!?

ACCORDING TO YOUR PHILOSOPHY, WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN GAME PRODUCTION?

..... THE DEAD-LINES.

YES. YOU CAN DO IT.

IF ONLY IN SPEED, SHOW ME YOU CAN SURPASS THE MASTERS.

HA HA .....

DO I HAVE TO REACH A LEVEL THAT NOT EVEN UTAKO KASUMI HAS...?

AH HA HA...

HA-HA-HA...! AH-HA-HA-HA-HA!

BE QUIET! SHUT UP AND GET WRITING!

EEP! OKAY!

KATA KATA

KATA KATA

KATA KATA

KATA KATA

.....

BUT IT'D PROBABLY BE AN HOUR WAIT NOW.

CONVE-NIENCE STORE BENTO WOULD BE BETTER...

LETTING YOUR MIND WANDER IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS... ARE YOU REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS?

BIKU (JOLT)

SHOULD I GO BUY SOME-THING? OR ORDER A PIZZA?

FUAAA (YAWN)

...SAY, SENPAI, ARE YOU HUNGRY?

B-BUT YOU CAN'T FIGHT ON AN EMPTY STOMACH ...

SHE'S IN BER-SERKER WORKER MODE!

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO DIE IF YOU GO WITHOUT FOOD AND DRINK FOR A COUPLE DAYS!

IT'S LESS THAN TWO DAYS UNTIL THE DEADLINE, AND YET YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT NONSENSE LIKE FOOD?

TON

TON

TON (TOK)

TON

TON

S-SO WE CAN'T EVEN TAKE BATHS UNTIL AFTER THE SCRIPT'S DONE?

LISTEN. AS OF NOW, NEVER MIND FOOD— EVEN SLEEP IS OFF-LIMITS!

WE NEED TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE LITTLE TIME WE HAVE LEFT!

IF I SWAL-LOWED THAT, I'D DIE!

IF YOU NEED FOOD, HOW ABOUT YOUR NAILS? THERE'S ALSO THE SKIN ON YOUR FINGERS AND THE INSIDES OF YOUR CHEEKS.

AND IF THAT'S ST LL NOT ENOUGH, YOUR TONGUE ...!

CLOCK: SUNDAY

AS I SAID, THE THREE CHOICES FOR LINES...

.....

.....

...THAT'S AN EX-CEPTION. YOU'RE ALLOWED FIFTEEN MINUTES.

NO, YOU DON'T GET IT AT ALL!

OF THE THREE OPTIONS YOU'VE CREATED, THE ONLY CHOICE THAT DOESN'T SUCK IS THE CORRECT ONE!

YOU NEED TO MAKE PLAYERS WANT TO SELECT THE OTHER CHOICES TOO!

FOCUS ON YOUR OWN SCRIPT MORE, NOT MINE!

I KNOW THAT ALREADY!

YOU NEED TO GIVE EACH ONE ITS OWN DISTINCT MEANING!

THAT'S WHAT SOMEONE WHO CAN'T HANDLE REALITY SAYS, LOSER-KUN.

I CAN'T HELP IT! I'M OUT OF IDEAS!

CAN IT, RINRI-KUN! CAN IT!

GAAH! FINALLY, IT COMES OUT, EH, SENPAI!?

JUST NOW, THAT WAS THE LAST THING YOU SHOULD EVER SAY TO ME, WASN'T IT!?

HOW'S MY FIRST DRAFT ...?

S-SO ...?

NOW GET TO WORK ON THE SECOND DRAFT. THROW IT ALL OUT AND START OVER FROM SQUARE ONE.

WITH YOUR SPEED, YOU CAN DO IT.

URRGHH!

URK!

BUT RIGHT NOW, IT'S NOTHING BUT MASS-PRODUCED TRASH.

WELL, IF I HAD TO BE POSITIVE, I WOULD PRAISE HOW MUCH AND HOW QUICKLY YOU WROTE, IF NOTHING ELSE.

THOSE ARE THE ONLY AREAS WHERE YOU TRULY SURPASSED ME, YOU SEE?

SUNDAY

LAST DAY OF THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL

BUT WHAT YOU'VE WRITTEN HERE IS...

UGH...

LOOK, RINRI-KUN. A SCRIPT IS MORE THAN JUST AN OUTLET FOR YOUR OWN EXCITEMENT.

IT'S TOTALLY CLICHÉD.

2 JIN THOOM

GEH!

AND IT'S SO FORCED IT'S INCREDI-BLE...

URK!

THERE'S A LOT OF FLUFF, AND WHEN IT'S NEEDED, THE TEXT YOU WANT ISN'T THERE.

AIEE!

IT'S POORLY BALANCED TOO.

GUH!

IT ISN'T TIME TO PANIC YET.

... YOU'RE NOT LOS NG HEART, ARE YOU?

YES'M.

SO GET STARTED ON A THIRD DRAFT.

FROM SQUARE ONE, OF COURSE.

... HEY...

...RINRI-KUN?

HM? WHAT IS IT?

.....

DO YOU REALLY THINK AN ENDING LIKE THIS COULD WORK?

...I DON'T THINK RURI HAS THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY.

I SHOULDN'T SAY THIS, BUT...

?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THIS FROM HER OWN MOM?

BUT HER FEELINGS ARE SO INTENSE THAT SHE PUTS SEIJI IN DANGER.

WELL, THAT'S BASED ON HINDSIGHT.

NEVER MIND THAT. IN ORDER TO WIN SEIJI, SHE EVEN ENDANGERS MEGURI AND THE OTHER HEROINES.

WELL, SHE'S A TYPE THAT YOU DON'T SEE MUCH ANYMORE. THE REASON PEOPLE WILL STILL FIND HER LOVABLE IS THANKS TO YOU AND ERIRI.

I DON'T THINK SHE WOULD EVER ACCEPT HER.

I DON'T THINK MEGURI COULD EVER FORGIVE A RURI WHO ACTS LIKE THAT.

I THINK SHE WOULD!

...RURI ISN'T ENTITLED TO BE LOVED BY THE PLAYERS.

MEGURI WOULD JUST LET IT WASH OVER HER.

BUT I LOVE RURI.

...SO WHICH DO YOU PREFER, HER OR MEGURI?

GATA (CLATTER)

I ABSOLUTELY ADORE BOTH OF THEM, DUH!

THEY'RE THE MAIN HEROINES WE ALL CREATED AFTER ALL!

PUL (FWIP)

THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M GETTING AT...

MAYBE I'M BEING GREEDY?

TIMES A HUNDRED.

BUT I WANTED THAT LEG OF THE ROUTE NO MATTER WHAT!

UGH! THIS IS WHY I CAN'T STAND MOE PIGS LIKE YOU!

SU (SWF)

DON'T YOU WANT TO SEE IT, UTAHA-SENPAI ...?

MEGURI AND RURI VYING FOR SEIJI WHILE BEING ADORABLY JEALOUS OF EACH OTHER, WITH EVERYONE ELSE LAUGHING IN SHOCK?

A HAPPY-GO-LUCKY ENDING LIKE THAT...

KATA

KATA- (KTAK)

TO BE SURE, PART OF ME THINKS IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, AND PART OF ME WANTS TO SEE IT.

OH.

THAT'S ...

...JUST LIKE RURI AND MEGURI.

KATA (TAK)

Idiot...

HOW... ...IS IT?

YOU MEAN YOU'RE TOO STUNNED? OR YOU WON'T HELP ANYMORE?

NO, I MEAN IT HAS MY APPROVAL. NO MORE REVISIONS.

REALLY? IT'S OKAY!?

IF I'M HONEST, I DON'T LIKE IT AT ALL... BUT IT'S ULTIMATELY DOWN TO PERSONAL TASTE.

IF I LOOK AT IT UNBIASED, IT MAKES FOR A VERY PASSIONATE AND ENJOYABLE TALE.

PATA (FLOP)

ENOUGH!

I WON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD.

THIS OFTEN HAPPENS AT THE END OF A LONG BATTLE. WHEN YOU CUT FREE THE THREADS THAT HAVE BEEN HELD TAUT FOR SO LONG, YOU CAN'T MOVE YOUR BODY ANYMORE... NOT EVEN YOUR ARMS.

DOSA (THUMP)

S-SENPAI, I FEEL...

FURA (TEETER)

OH. HA HA... HUH?

YOU MEAN YOU WANT TO BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF ME, RIGHT...?

OH, HOW FRUSTRATING...! I COULD HAVE HAD MY WAY WITH YOU, RINRI-KUN...!

R-REALLY?

YES. THAT'S HOW I FEEL RIGHT NOW.

...I SEE.

GUTTARI (SPENT)

ぐったり..

WHAT?

ONLY— SORRY TO BE A WET BLANKET— THERE IS ONE UNFORTUNATE THING I HAVE TO TELL YOU...

ALL I DID WAS LOOK AT IT WITH A COOL HEAD, ENSURED IT MADE THE GRADE, AND WAS HONEST ABOUT IT.

WELL, ANYWAY... THANK YOU, UTAHA-SENPAI.

STOP. YOU DON'T NEED TO APOLOGIZE.

REWRITING IT...DIDN'T KILL THOSE GIRLS AT ALL.

THEY SURVIVED, AND THEY STILL CRY, AND LAUGH, AND LOVE WITH ALL THEIR HEARTS ...

THROUGH THAT PROCESS, SOME CHARACTERS' PERSONALITIES HAVE CHANGED, AS HAVE SOME DETAILS.

IT'S NOT MY PROJECT.

YOU BROUGHT TO LIFE THE WORLD AND CHARACTERS THAT I SUPPOSEDLY CREATED THROUGH YOUR OWN DECISIONS AND DESIRES.

MM.

I'M SORRY. I... BULLDOZED OVER IT AS THE DIRECTOR...

I CAN'T ALLOW THE NAME "UTAKO KASUMI" TO BE IN THIS PROJECT'S CREDITS.

I...

...SEE.

IT MADE ME HAPPY TO READ— I MEAN, PLAY IT.

IT WAS FUN.

IT WAS EXCITING.

THAT'S WHY THIS IS THE ONE AND ONLY STORY CREATED BY TOMOYA AKI IN THE WORLD OF UTAKO KASUMI.

THIS IS *OUR* COMPLETELY ORIGINAL SCENARIO, ONE THAT COULDN'T BE CREATED BY YOU OR ME ALONE.

SO, RINRI-KUN, HOW ABOUT THIS?

—

...ARE YOU OKAY GOING WITH THAT NAME?

AS LONG AS YOU ARE.

I'M NOT SURE IF I SHOULD BE SCARED OR HON-ORED.

IT'S SET-TLED, THEN.

GUGU (INCHD

NO MORE CHANGES, OKAY...?

TOMOYA-KUN.....

KYU (SQUEEZE)

I HARDLY TOOK PART THIS YEAR...

ぼー BOOO (DAZE)

THE SCRIPT REVISIONS ARE DONE.

THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL'S OVER TOO.

AT THIS SCHOOL, THAT'S THE SAME AS SAYING, "PLEASE GO OUT WITH ME," RIGHT?

IT'S THE TRADITION HERE FOR GIRLS TO ASK THE BOYS.

HERE IT IS, THE TIME-HONORED NON-OTAKU EVENT—

THE FOLK DANCE.

CAN YOU DRAW WHEN IT'S THIS DARK? YOU'RE NEAR-SIGHTED TOO, AREN'T YOU?

...HEY.

(CHIRA! (GLANCE)

... MEANING ...

...IT'S PROBABLY OKAY IF I GO TALK TO HER.

DID YOU ENJOY THE FESTIVAL?

NO ONE WOULD THINK THIS DRAWING'S FOR A DOUJIN DATING SIM...

I WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND HOW AN ARTIST WORKS AS LONG AS I LIVE.

I JUST NEED TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE SCENERY. EVEN IF I CAN'T SEE RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME, I KNOW HOW THE DRAWING'S GONNA TURN OUT.

I WON'T APOLOGIZE FOR THAT. YOU HAVE A GOOD EXCUSE, RIGHT?

THEY'RE ALL, "HOW COME YOU'RE NOT IN THE MISS TOYOGASAKI CONTEST THIS YEAR?"

THANKS TO YOU, I'VE BEEN BOMBARDED WITH QUESTIONS.

SORRY! SORRY! SORRY!

EXCUSE ME? DID THE DIRECTOR WHO ADDED A LATE STORY LINE AND DRAMATICALLY INCREASED MY WORKLOAD, THEREBY TRAPPING ME IN MY HOUSE THESE PAST TWO DAYS, SAY SOMETHING?

...SO WHERE'S UTAHA KASUMIGAOKA?

YOU TWO WERE TOGETHER TWO WHOLE DAYS, WEREN'T YOU?

I'M STILL NOT APOLOGIZING. IT'S YOUR OWN CHOICE TO KEEP IT A SECRET.

IT CERTAINLY FELT THAT WAY, BUT IT'S A BIT WEIRD THAT I COULDN'T ACTUALLY SAY WHY.

I CAN FEEL THEM STARING, BUT NO GUY WOULD SEE ME AS A THREAT.

WELL, YOUR REPUTATION KEEPS YOU SAFE THERE.

(STARE)

...Y'KNOW, EVEN TALKING TO YOU LIKE THIS IN FRONT OF ALL THESE PEOPLE IS BREAKING THE RULES.

LET ME TELL YOU, NOTHING HAPPENED.

I KNOW THAT. SHE'S ALL TALK. SHE'D NEVER HAVE THE GUTS TO REALLY TRY ANYTHING WITH YOU.

ALWAYS SO CRUEL.

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT BETWEEN US.

WE'RE BONDED BY LIKE-MINDED PASSIONS. IT'S A LOVELY TEACHER-STUDENT SENSE OF AFFECTION. YOU JUST WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.

...I EXPECT SHE DOESN'T WANT TO UNDER-STAND IT THAT WAY EITHER.

?

SHE SAID SHE NEEDED TO TALK TO KATOU.

IN ANY CASE, UTAHA-SENPAI IS OVER THERE.

I SEE. SO YOU ENDED UP REVISING THAT MUCH...

GUTTAH! (SPENT.)

YES... KATOU-SAN, I HARDLY UNDERSTAND THE WORDS THAT ARE COMING OUT OF MY OWN MOUTH.

IF I SAY ANYTHING WEIRD, PLEASE TAKE NO NOTICE.

WELL DONE, KASUMIGAOKA-SENPAI. YOU MUST BE TIRED.

I'M CURIOUS HOW THE "MAIN ISSUE" WENT FOR YOU, SENPAI?

UH, I'M NOT SURE...

WHAT TO SAY TO THAT...

HOW COULD IT GET ANYWHERE? I HAD MY HANDS FULL WITH THE REWRITES.

UMM...

SO, THEN...

WHAT?

!

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN!?

OH, HA HA...

BUT IT'S AT LEAST HALF YOUR OWN FAULT, ISN'T IT?

NO COMMENTS, PLEASE. NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, I'LL FEEL MISERABLE.

.....

HE PUTS YOU BEFORE EVERY-BODY...

OUT OF THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF CONCERN FOR YOU, HE'LL SUDDENLY FLY FROM TAMASAKI TO WA-GOUSHI.

.....

I SEE...

...IT MEANS AKI-KUN CARES TOO MUCH ABOUT YOU, KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI.

HOWEVER MUCH OTHERS CARE FOR HER...

...EVEN IF SHE'S ALWAYS TREATED LIKE SOMEONE SPECIAL— A LITTLE SISTER, A MASTER, SOMEONE TO ADMIRE...

...IN THE END, SHE CAN'T BE CLOSE TO THEM IN A NORMAL WAY.

I REALLY AM THE RURI FROM OUR GAME.

...THE ROUTE YOU WANTED HIM TO CHOOSE REALLY WAS...

SO...

ULTI-MATELY, RURI...IS SAYUKA, ISN'T SHE?

FROM "METRO-NOME IN LOVE"...

NOW THAT I THINK OF IT..... CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING ELSE?

WHAT?

KATOU-SAN, LISTEN. DO YOU KNOW THE STORY ABOUT "THE TREASURE CHEST OF MEMORIES AND THE TOOLBOX YOU KEEP CLOSE BY"?

SORRY, NOT AT ALL...

IS IT A FAMOUS ONE?

?

.....NO IDEA.

SORRY IF I'M MISINTER-PRETING...

...BUT EVEN I'VE READ EVERY VOLUME TWICE.

...KATOU-SAN.

...I SEE.

YOU NOTICED. YOU MIGHT BE THE FIRST PERSON TO.

IT'S LIKE SHE'S THE REAL REINCAR-NATION OF RURI.

THEY LOOK NOTHING ALIKE, BUT THE WAY THEY THINK AND ACT...

YOU SEE, SAYUKA WAS THE FIRST CHARACTER I EVER WROTE.

BACK THEN, I HAD NO EXPERIENCE OR SKILL AT ALL IN SHAPING CHARACTERS.

AND I DIDN'T GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE... I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT OTHER GIRLS WERE LIKE.

THAT'S... WELL, THAT'S 'COS OTHER PEOPLE DON'T KNOW RURI YET.

OHH. AH HA HA...

BUT RINRI-KUN — MY NUMBER ONE FAN — HASN'T NOTICED IT!

THAT'S WHY...

...I WANTED TO MAKE RURI WIN THIS TIME.

KASUMIGAOKA-SENPAI...

SO ALL I COULD DO WAS LOOK TO WHAT WAS CLOSEST— MYSELF— AS AN EXAMPLE.

BACK THEN...

...I MYSELF WAS ACTUALLY ROOTING FOR SAYUKA.

I'VE BEEN SEEING INSIDE YOUR HEAD SINCE FOR-EVER.

BUT SHE LOVES THAT KIND OF STUFF TOO!

A REAL OTAKU-PANDERING AFFAIR... AN UTTERLY FLAWLESS MAIN CHARACTER, HEROINES BASED SOLELY ON MOE APPEAL WHO CONVENIENTLY FALL IN LOVE WITH THE GUY AND GET INTO LOVEY-DOVEY CATFIGHTS WITH EACH OTHER, AND EVERYONE LIVES CAREFREE AND HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

I'M SURE IT'S ONE CREEPY THING AFTER ANOTHER.

.....YOU HAVEN'T EVEN SEEN MY STORY YET, HAVE YOU?

SO, IS THE SCRIPT REALLY DONE THIS TIME?

...I CAN'T VOUCH FOR ITS QUALITY. AFTER ALL, I WROTE PART OF IT.

YEAH, BUT ...

YEAH!

...AND IZUMI HASHIMA, AND NOW WE'LL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF WINNING, RIGHT!?

THEN IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MUCH YOU RUIN UTAHA KASUMIGAOKA.

.....BUT IT MIGHT GRAB MORE PEOPLE THAN THE OLD SCRIPT, RIGHT!?

WE'RE GOING UP AGAINST ROUGE EN ROUGE...

I MIGHT DRAG DOWN UTAHA-SENPAI'S WORK IN PEOPLE'S EYES.

WHEN DID YOU GET HERE —!?

IT'S NOT LIKE I'M GONNA TAKE IT BACK.

I CAN'T IGNORE WHAT I JUST HEARD, SAWAMURA-SAN.

NO, THAT ISN'T—

ONII-SAMA!

TIME TO RUN AWAY... I DON'T HAVE THE ENERGY FOR THIS.

HEY! ONII-SAMA!

SORRY, NON-OTAKU! LET ME PASS!

ONII-SAMA ...

HUH !?

HERE THEY GO AGAIN ...

YOU LET HIM MAKE HIS WRITING DEBUT! DON'T WORD THINGS SO WEIRD!

I CAN'T DO THAT! WHATEVER ELSE MIGHT HAPPEN, I WON'T DAMAGE RINRI-KUN'S REPUTATION. I MEAN, I LET HIM *DO IT FOR THE FIRST TIME* WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL...

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT TOO MUCH. IF OUR GAME DOESN'T SELL, YOU CAN JUST BLAME YOUR COWRITER. THAT'S THE SECRET TO SUCCESS FOR A GAME WRITER!

YOU'RE SO MEAN, TOMOYA-KUN— THAT IS, SOUMA-ONIISAMA ...!

I HEARD A FAMILIAR VOICE, SO NATURALLY, I TURNED, BUT—

RURI .....?

NO... WAIT...

...I'M SO HAPPY, ONII-SAMA.

UMM, KATOU...

NO, AKI-KUN. IF YOU DON'T PLAY THE ROLE ALL THE WAY THROUGH, IT'S GOING TO MAKE KASUMIGAOKA-SENPAI VERY ANGRY.

SO, THEN, SHE PUT YOU UP TO THIS...?

SFX: CHIRA (GLANCE)

YES.

SHE SAID SHE WANTED ME TO STAY AS RURI AT LEAST UNTIL THE END OF TODAY.

YES— RURI. I KEPT CALLING TO YOU ...!

FOR YEARS, DECADES ...

FOR AGES AND AGES...

SHE SAID SHE WANTED TO LET THE GIRL MAKE HER DREAMS COME TRUE.

YOU SEE, SHE SAID SHE WANTED TO GIVE LAST RITES.

MASOCHISM IS BECOMING SECOND NATURE TO YOU, KATOU...

IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT. I MEAN, IT'S ME AND YOU, AKI-KUN.

BUT IF WE DO THAT, THEN EVERYONE WHO SEES US WILL THINK— YOU KNOW ABOUT THE FOLK DANCE, DON'T YOU?

SO, COULD YOU PLEASE STAY IN CHAR-ACTER JUST FOR TODAY, AKI-KUN?

WELL, IN ANY CASE, "WE'VE" DONE EVERYTHING WE NEEDED TO.

YOU DON'T NEED TO EMPHASIZE THE PLURAL!

IT'S FINE. IT'S A COLLAB-ORATIVE PEN NAME FOR THIS ONE GAME.

I'D NEVER CONSOLE MYSELF WITH SUCH PITIFUL DELUSIONS.

AND SO, I'M GOING TO USE "UTAKO TAKI" FOR MY CREDIT.

...ARE YOU NUTS?

...I KNOW THAT.

NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS YOUR ART...

...THE FINAL...

...AND GREATEST BATTLE OF ALL.

WE MADE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR YOU BY CUTTING IT SO CLOSE WITH THE LAST SCENARIO.

FOR THAT, I SINCERELY APOLOGIZE.

THE DELAYS AREN'T REALLY 'COS OF YOU...

...I WILL NOT FORGIVE YOU.

BUT IF YOUR WORK BELITTLES OUR STORY...

...NO NEED TO SAY IT. I'M ALREADY FULLY AWARE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THE MAIN EVENT OF THE FESTIVAL IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.

I'M GOING TO DANCE WITH RINRI-KUN.

WHA—!?

YOU'RE LEAVING ALREADY?

WELL, ON THAT NOTE, I'D BEST BE OFF.

.....

UTAHA KASUMI-GAOKA!

H-HANG ON!

DESPITE MY FATIGUE, I CAME BACK TO SCHOOL FOR THIS ONE PURPOSE.

IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR ME TO SWITCH WITH KATOU.

I'LL SEE YOU, THEN ...

GOOD LUCK...

...ERIRI SAWA-MURA.

SAWAMURA-SAN...YOU'D BEST DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT BEFORE YOU END UP STUCK THAT WAY.

YOU CAN DANCE WITH HIM AFTER ME. I DON'T EXPECT RINRI-KUN WILL OBJECT.

WELL, IN YOUR CASE, MAYBE YOU WON'T BECAUSE OF ALL THOSE FALSE MASKS YOU WEAR.

...LET ANYONE BEAT ME...!
I WON'T ...
I WON'T LOSE ...

.....WAAAAH!
END

BIRIRIRIRI (BURRRIP)

MIRA (FLUTTER)

.....

CHAPTER 30

珈琲所 カメダ珈琲店

SO, HERE'S THE PROBLEM, RINRI-KUN.

SIGN: COFFEE SPOT / KAMEDA CAFÉ

BISHI (JAB)

A GIRL WHO I'D THOUGHT OF AS A FRIEND AND COULD RELAX AROUND...

...SUDDENLY ACHIEVES A MAGNIFICENT TRANSFORMATION ONE DAY, WHICH MAKES HER THE CENTER OF ATTENTION.

HER EXPRESSION, AND SPEECH, AND BEHAVIOR ARE AS FLAT AS USUAL. SHE'S STILL AN EXTREMELY ORDINARY GIRL...

NO. IT'S ONLY HER HAIR THAT'S CHANGED.

YES, KATOU HAS CHANGED.

UM...

...BUT IT WAS YOU WHO MADE ME CHANGE IN THE FIRST PLACE, KASUMIGAOKA-SENPAI...

SIGN: AV ROOM

...DURING OUR CIRCLE TIME, UTAHA-SENPAI REALLY GRILLED HER. AND THEN...

BUT AFTER SCHOOL...

KATOU HAD BEEN CONFESSED TO FOR THE FIRST TIME* IN HER LIFE!

*ACCORDING TO HER

SOMEONE CONFESSED TO ME.

UM... YES.

IN SUCH AN EVENT ...

...IS SHE?

AFTER CLASS, SHE WAS EVEN CALLED AS DE AND CONFESSED TO. NOW SHE APPEARS PERPLEXED BY IT.

...WHAT KIND OF ACTION WOULD YOU— I MEAN, THE PROTAGONIST— TAKE, AND HOW WOULD THINGS PLAY OUT? THESE THINGS COULD MAKE FOR AN INTERESTING STORY.

BIGHII! (FWIP)

GIVE ME ANY NARRATIVE TROPES YOU CAN THINK OF!

THE NEW KATOU-SAN'S POPULARITY IS SOARING, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE BOYS.

ERR...

HUH?

WHAT ABOUT IN CONCRETE TERMS?

TRY EXPRESSING IT THROUGH A MAIN CHARACTER MONO-LOGUE.

ZUI (CLOSE)

...FIRST OF ALL, IT'S NOT JUST THE HEROINE. THE HERO IS ALSO BEWILDERED BY THE REACTIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THEM. IT'S A NATURAL CHANGE TO THE PAIR'S STATE OF MIND.

MM. WELL...

"WHAT IS THIS SADNESS IN MY HEART? DO I SEE HER AS MORE...?" IS JUST MY STANDARD RESPONSE, SEE?

I'M NOT TRYING TO AVOID THE QUES-TION...

THE LYRICS TO "SEVENTH ○OON" DON'T COUNT AS AN ANSWER. DON'T BE FACETIOUS. THINK ABOUT IT SERIOUSLY.

"WHAT IS THIS SADNESS IN MY HEART? WHERE IS IT LEADING ME?"

WELL, FOLLOWING SUCH A ROUTINE DEVELOPMENT, THERE'S OFTEN A CONFESSION EVENT CONNECTED TO IT...

...SOMETHING LIKE, "I'VE FINALLY REALIZED MY OWN FEELINGS FOR YOU..."

AND HE PURPOSELY SAYS IT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER BOY...

IN A SENSE, IT'S THE HERO'S ULTIMATE SPOTLIGHT MOMENT.

URK!

AHH!

IT'S VERY QUESTIONABLE WHETHER SUCH AN UTTERLY PEDESTRIAN LINE WOULD DRAW IN THE PLAYERS.

SO IT MAY BE, BUT IT'S CLICHÉD, TRITE, HACKNEYED, AND COMPLETELY LACKS FRESHNESS.

RINRI-KUN, COULD YOU TRY SAYING IT WITH FEELING?

HUH?

BUT EVEN IF IT IS, SAY, A CLICHÉD LINE, HOW THE AUDIENCE TAKES IT MIGHT CHANGE DEPENDING ON BOTH THE DELIVERY AND THE PERFORMANCE ...

WAIT. HEARING THE CREATOR SAY THAT...

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT WITH A COOL HEAD, IT JUST LOOKS LIKE HE'S BEEN SO CONFIDENT THAT HE'S LET HER BE UP TILL NOW. BUT SUDDENLY, WHEN SOME GUY'S ABOUT TO STEAL HER AWAY, HE'S SACRIFICING THEIR FRIENDSHIP.

READY? NOW FOLLOW MY LINE. GO!

"I'VE FINALLY REALIZED IT. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE FOR ME, SENPAI..."

AND WHAT IS THAT?

HOW COME THE LINE'S SORTA CHANGED!?

RECORDING

BAAAN CBAM

VOICE RECORDER

DON'T YOU MEAN TO GET SOME OTHER JUICES FLOWING?

WELL, TO GET MY CREATIVE JUICES FLOWING, OKAY?

WHAT WERE YOU PLANNING TO USE THAT FOR?

PLEASE! ALL THIS DISSING IS GOING TO KILL OFF OUR FAN BASE, YOU TWO ...!

DON'T WANNA HEAR IT FROM SOMEONE WHO PRETENDS TO BE AN UPSTANDING WRITER AND HONOR STUDENT BUT, UNDERNEATH, IS A DIRTY-FANTASY-OBSESSED SMUT PEDDLER.

YOU SEE? AS SUCH A FOUL-MINDED EROTIC DOUJIN ARTIST, YOU TAKE EVERY EXPRESSION TO ITS MOST VULGAR CONCLUSION. I WORRY IF YOU'LL EVER BE ABLE TO FUNCTION IN SOCIETY.

THEY WERE ALWAYS JUST FRIENDS, NEVER MOVING BEYOND, BUT NOW, AT LAST, SHE FACES THE FINAL CHAL-LENGE...

OH! I'VE SEEN THAT LOTS OF TIMES TOO.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE HEROINE WAS ACTING LIKE SHE WAS INTERESTED IN SOME OTHER GUY IN ORDER TO GAUGE THE PROTAGONIST'S TRUE FEELINGS.

...OTHER TROPES CAN COME FROM OTHER POINTS OF VIEW.

HA HA HA!

A CREEPY OTAKU LIKE ME, WHO COULD NEVER BE MORE THAN A MINOR CHARACTER IN THE REAL WORLD, WOULD EMPATHIZE WITH THE BAIT.

BUT EVEN IN REAL LIFE, ONLY SOME JACKASS WHO'S ACTUALLY POPULAR AS THE MAIN CHARACTER WOULD THINK THAT.

BUT THIS BOY EXISTS FOR THAT PURPOSE IN THE FIRST PLACE. AS LONG AS WE EMPATHIZE WITH THE PROTAGONIST, WE WON'T WORRY ABOUT THE OTHER BOY.

BUT IN THE END, THE MAIN CHARACTER WILL WIN THE HEROINE BACK, RIGHT?

I FEEL SORRIER FOR THE BOY WHO WAS USED.

SHE TALKS UP THE OTHER BOY IN FRONT OF THE HERO AND BOASTS THAT SHE'S BEEN ASKED ON A DATE.

ERM, UH...

UM...

IF I TOLD YOU I'M SORRY... YOU'D GET ANGRY AGAIN, WOULDN'T YOU?

HUH?

? ?

WHA —?

GUH?

YOU CAN GO ●●● ..... FOR REAL, JUST ●●● .....

.....YOU ACTUALLY SAID IT, YOU ●●●● .....!

..... YOU ...

..... WELL, IT CER-TAINLY COULD.

GESHI (THWACK)

...OW!

THE HEROINE GETS POPULAR AND S PUZZLED BY IT, AND—WHAT COULD SHE BE THINKING?—SHE ASKS THE HERO TO "PLEASE BE MY FAKE BOYFRIEND." IT COULD DEVELOP THAT WAY, RIGHT?

TH-THAT'S RIGHT! THERE'S THIS TROPE TOO, ISN'T THERE?

WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON!?

HOWEVER MUCH SHE WHISPERS SWEET WORDS, IT'S NOT WITH TRUE LOVE.

HOWEVER HAPPILY SHE SEEMS TO SMILE, IT'S NOT FROM THE HEART.

HOWEVER MUCH SHE STARES AT HIM, IT'S NOT WITH TRUE LONGING.

BUT THEN THE HERO REALIZES— THEIR RELATION-SHIP IS SIMPLY A PALE IMITATION.

HE'S EMBARRASSED 'COS OF ALL THE TEASING FROM THOSE AROUND HIM, BUT FOR SOME REASON, HE FEELS HAPPY ABOUT THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM SHRINKING...

AT FIRST, THE HERO IS CONFUSED BUT STILL HAS TO ACT THE PART.

THE ACCUMULATED STRESS ULTIMATELY EXPLODES, AND THEIR FLEETING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP COMES TO AN END.

THE MAIN CHARACTER FEELS TORN BY THE FALSENESS OF THEIR ACTIONS.

I SEE. WHAT A FIX...

ABBRE-VIATION REFUSED!?

YOU DON'T NEED TO SHORTEN IT.

BISHI (JAB)

SUCH A SAD TALE OF FALSE LOVE—"NISE-MONO NO KOI"!

IN SHORT—

BUT .....

INDEED. GAL GAMES AND MOE COMICS THAT PROMISE HAPPY ENDINGS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL THAT WAY.

YOU TAUGHT ME THAT BEFORE, UTAHA-SENPAI.

GA (KICK)

GA

GA

YEOW. OW. OW. OW!

THE BIGGER THE REVERSAL, THE MORE EXCITING THE STORY BECOMES, AND THE MORE WE FALL FOR THE HEROINE!

THE DEEPER THE DRAMA, THE MORE THE HAPPY ENDING THAT OVERTURNS IT ALL SHINES!

NO! STOP! ARE YOU SERIOUSLY GONNA INSERT SOMETHING SO DEVOID OF MEN'S HOPES AND DREAMS AS THAT CYNICAL IMAGE OF GIRLS!?

...SHE TURNS INTO A TANNED SLUT, AND IT ENDS WITH HER FLASHING A DOUBLE PEACE SIGN, HER EYES ROLLED BACK, AND HER TONGUE HANGING OUT, "AHEGAO" STYLE. THAT'S POSSIBLE TOO.

SHE MAY BECOME DISILLUSIONED, OR SHE MAY END UP GOING WITH THE GUY WHO CONFESSED FIRST...OR HE COULD TURN OUT TO BE TOTAL SCUM AND HAVE HIS WAY WITH HER, AFTER WHICH...

...IN MORE REALISTIC ROMANCE NOVELS, SUCH TRIFLING MISCOMMUNI-CATIONS WILL EVENTUALLY LEAD TO MOUNTING GRAVE, IRREPARABLE DEVELOP-MENTS...

WE IMAGINED MANY POSSIBLE PATHS FOR THE "GIRL RECEIVES A CONFESSION FROM A BOY OTHER THAN THE LEAD" SITUATION, BUT I WONDER WHICH OF THOSE APPLIES TO YOU RIGHT NOW.

AND NOW, THE NEXT PROB-LEM...

I KEEP TELLING YOU— EVEN IF A CREATOR THINKS THAT, THEY CAN'T SAY IT OUT LOUD!

THEN I SAY I WILL, BUT IF I MAKE THE HEROINE AND A MINOR CHARACTER A COUPLE, THE READERS GET EVEN ANGRIER. THE AUDIENCE CAN BE A REAL PAIN, YOU KNOW.

SOMETIMES, THE AUDIENCE SAYS THEY WANT THE WRITER TO MAKE THE MINOR CHARACTERS HAPPY.

SENPAI... ISN'T GOING TO LET KATOU JUST IGNORE HER.

WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE? WILL YOU ACCEPT OR TURN HIM DOWN? OR WILL YOU WAIT A WHILE TO SEE HOW HE REACTS?

UMM, WASN'T ALL THAT TALK A REALLY ROUNDABOUT WAY OF GETTING TO THE MAIN POINT?

...MAYBE I SHOULDN'T SAY THIS, BUT.....

UM, ERR...

...AND HIS ACTIONS, DECISIONS, AND LIKABILITY.

STOP AL-READY!

GA (KICK)

YOUR ANSWER COULD HAVE A GREAT INFLUENCE ON OUR USELESS HERO...

AAAAH!! I CAN'T STAND IT! I GOTTA GET AWAY FROM THIS TABLE!

MUKU (TIRE)

.....

...IT FEELS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN LIVING ON THE EDGE LATELY, KASUMIGAOKA-SENPAI.

WINTER COMIKET IS LESS THAN A MONTH AWAY, AND WE HAVE TO FINISH THE GOLD MASTER IN LESS THAN A WEEK.

HOWEVER, THIS IS SORT OF A CRITICAL TIME FOR THIS CIRCLE.

WELL, I DO FEEL SOMETIMES THAT I HAVEN'T LIVED LIFE TO THE FULLEST.

AT THIS TIME, ALL OUR FEELINGS NEED TO BE ONE.

SO, KATOU-SAN...

KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI ...

D●●, D●●, D●●, GO TO HE●●! D●● AND BE FOREVER GONE FROM THE LIGHT NOVEL INDUSTRY!

...WELL, SETTING ASIDE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS MOMENT, THE ARTWORK STILL ISN'T FINISHED, AND THERE CONTINUES TO BE A DISRUPTIVE ELEMENT CREATING DISORDER AND CRISIS IN THE CIRCLE.

UTAHA-SENPAI ...

DON'T YOU ALREADY HAVE THE ANSWER?

YOU SAID IT BEFORE YOURSELF, DIDN'T YOU?

I DID?

WE ALL NEED TO GET OUR FEELINGS IN ORDER RIGHT NOW.

KATOU...

I'M HAPPY WITH HOW THINGS ARE.

THE TRUTH IS... I WAS CONFESSED TO...

...BUT THEN REJECTED THE NEXT SECOND.

HUH? WH-WHY ...?

ER, NO, YOU SEE...

...HANG ON, KATOU-SAN.

THAT IS A MAJOR WARNING SIGN FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR COMMUNITY!

THE THING IS...

...AS SOON AS I SAID, "I'M A LITTLE BUSY RIGHT NOW 'COS WINTER COMIKET'S COMING UP," HE COMPLETELY LOST INTEREST...

WELL, IT WASN'T THE GREATEST WAY TO PUT IT, BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO LIE. MAYBE IT'S FOR THE BEST.

WHAT CAN I SAY?

I GUESS I'VE TURNED INTO YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL OTAKU?

KATOU...

WAIT! HANG ON...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND A WORD YOU'RE SAYING!

WELL, LIKE I SAID BEFORE.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO ME RIGHT NOW ARE THE CIRCLE, THE PROJECT, AND WINTER COMIKET.

...MEGU-M?

B-BUT...WHEN YOU SAY THIS IS FOR THE CIRCLE, DO YOU ACTUALLY MEAN IT'S FOR SOMEONE IN PARTICULAR?

KASUMI-GAOKA-SENPAI... MAYBE YOU SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT ROMANCE-OBSESSED BRAIN?

...OH, MY PHONE.

EXCUSE ME A MOMENT.

4"

(BUZZZZ)

SORRY ABOUT THIS.

COULD WE CONTINUE THIS MEETING AT AKI-KUN'S HOUSE?

HYOUDOU-SAN HAS FINISHED THE ENDING THEME AND WANTS US TO COME HEAR IT.

ENDING... THEME?

I NEVER ASKED HER TO DO THAT! WHAT IS THIS?

THAT NIGHT

GOOD EVENIN', EVERYONE!

I'M MICCHI! THANK YOU FOR COMING TO MY FIRST ONE-MAN SHOW!

GYUHAAAAN (CHARAAAANG)

...OR MAYBE I SHOULD GET STRAIGHT TO THE SURPRISE!

GARI (SCRITCH)

OKAY, RIGHT INTO THE FIRST SONG, THEN...

IRA (SIRK)

I'VE ACTUALLY WRITTEN A NEW SONG TODAY!

GARI

IRA

OH. AH-HA. AH-HA-HA...

THIS IS MY FIRST TIME PERFORMING IT — HERE, JUST FOR YOU!

STOP!! YOU'LL BOTHER THE NEIGH-BORS!

BOO!

WEIRD... THE CROWD ISN'T REALLY FEELING IT TODAY.

YOU'RE JUST WAY TOO AMPED UP!

AWW! BUT, TOMO, DIDN'T YOU GO ON AND ON SAYING HOW MUCH YOU WANTED ME!?

!?

COULD I ASK YOU TO EXPLAIN THIS... KATOU?

BUT I CAN'T HELP IT! I'VE BEEN COMPOSING THIS TUNE FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS ON NO SLEEP, AND I JUST FINISHED!

UH, SURE. WELL...

SO I FIGURED MAYBE THIS LITTLE LADY OUGHTA STRIP DOWN— I MEAN, ROLL UP HER SLEEVES— FOR HIM!

...KHH!

MY COUSIN HERE MIGHT BE A BOY, BUT HE'S REALLY TRYING TO BE A MAN. I HAVE TO LET HIM JUST DO WHAT HE WANTS, RIGHT?

I TRIED TO REFUSE. I SAID, "IF YOU ASK ANY MORE OF ME, MY BODY WON'T BE ABLE TO TAKE IT!"

...KH!

I MEAN, HE'S BEEN TOTALLY HAVING HIS WAY WITH ME!

...I ASKED HYOUDOU-SAN TO TEST PLAY THE GAME FOR US.

WELL, A WHILE AGO...

HUH!?

I WAS ASKING KATOU. YOU BE QUIET.

HAAAH...

NOT ONLY IS SHE NOT MAKING SENSE, SHE ISN'T HELPING EITHER!

YEAH, TOTALLY! KAYTO-CHAN CONTACTED ME OUT OF THE BLUE LAST WEEK!

ALSO, I DON'T MIND YOU CALLING ME "-CHAN," BUT AT LEAST PLEASE PRONOUNCE MY NAME CORRECTLY.

IT'S OKAY, HYOUDOU-SAN. I'LL EXPLAIN...

OH, REALLY?

OOH, SORRY, SORRY, KATOU-CHAN!

SHE SEEMS AN-NOYED. THAT'S RARE.

TEST PLAY? WHY MICHIRU OF ALL PEOPLE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN "OF ALL PEOPLE" ...?

UH, SORRY ...

WELL, I CAN CER-TAINLY UNDER-STAND WHY YOU WOULD ASK THAT.

HYOUDOU-SAN IS A NON-OTAKU AND HAS NEVER PLAYED A VIDEO GAME.

BUT THE RESULTS WERE STILL WORTH IT.

AT FIRST, SHE HAD NO INTEREST AT ALL, AND SHE DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT BUGS AND STUFF. TEACHING HER HOW TO INSTALL IT IN THE FIRST PLACE TOOK AN HOUR...

...AND ALSO, SHE'D CONSTANTLY QUIT TO GO PLAY GUITAR.

...YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M GONNA KEEP CALLING YOU "KAYTO-CHAN."

KATOU ...

THERE'S NO WAY A DEBUT GAME FROM AN AMATEUR LIKE ME WOULD HAVE AN ENDING THEME!

HEY!

SHE SAID SHE WANTED TO BE OF GREATER HELP TO YOU.

HYOUDOU-SAN SAID SHE WASN'T BEING ENOUGH USE TO YOU AS IT WAS, AKI-KUN.

BUT WHY DID SHE WRITE THE SONG ...?

IT'S "KATOU."

... KATOU-CHAN.

YOU SWORE YOU WOULDN'T REPEAT THAT...!

KAYTO-CHAN!

YOUR PERSECU-TION COMPLEX IS WAY TOO STRONG.

...COULD YOU STOP JABBING ME SO NON-CHALANTLY, PLEASE?

SO THE MUSIC DIDN'T MATCH UP, AND IT WASN'T FULLY PRODUCED, AND THE ART WASN'T ALL THERE YET.

WELL, THE SCENARIO HYOUDOU-SAN COMPOSED FOR WAS STILL INCOMPLETE.

WELL, WE'RE MAKING A GAME.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN...

SO, THEN, WE BOTH REREAD THE NEW SCRIPT AND TALKED OVER WHAT KIND OF BACK-GROUND MUSIC SHOULD GO WHERE.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO UP TO ...?

WE FINISHED MOST OF IT LAST WEEKEND...

...BUT HYOUDOU-SAN SAID IT WAS DEFINITELY SHORT ONE SONG AND THAT SHE WAS GOING TO WRITE IT.

AT FIRST, I JUST WROTE MUSIC FOR IT, BUT SOMEHOW, IT WASN'T COMING THROUGH.

AS WE WERE WONDERING WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT, HYOUDOU-SAN SAID, "MAYBE I SHOULD TRY SINGING IT?"

ACTUALLY, AFTER THAT, I WRACKED MY BRAINS ABOUT THE LYRICS AND WAS WORKING ON THEM UNTIL THIS MORNING.

THE TWO LEAST OTAKU AMONG US... WORKING THIS HARD... OF THEIR OWN ACCORD...

AFTER ALL, THAT ONE ENDING WAS TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS!

IT WOULD BE SOOOO WRONG TO USE THE SAME MUSIC WITH THIS ENDING AS THE OTHERS, RIGHT?

IT'S AN AMAZINGLY HAPPY FINALE!

SO IT WAS A SURPRISE FOR ME...

SHE BARGED INTO MY HOUSE TO GET ME TO HEAR IT RIGHT AWAY... EVEN THOUGH SHE MUST BE BEAT.

I SEE...

SO, THAT'S THE WHOLE STORY! NOW YOU NEED TO LISTEN AND DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO USE IT. OKAY, DIRECTOR?

OKAY! CHECK IT OUT...

THE TITLE IS "A BALLAD FOR TOMO."

HUUUUH!?

YOU— WHA —!?

OH, I WASN'T INVOLVED WITH THE TITLE. THIS IS MY FIRST TIME HEARING IT.

LATER

WHEW! I'M LIKE A NEW PERSON! AH, THAT'S BETTER!

BOFUUU (FWUMP)

WHY DON'T YOU TAKE ONE TOO, TOMO?

MAYBE LATER.

AGH, CAN IT!

AH HA HA! I WIN! I WIN!

TOTAL VICTO-RY!

!?

MICHIRU!

Gui (GRAB)

IF YOU DON'T DO IT SOON, THAT REDNESS WON'T GO AWAY!

I CAN STILL TELL... SEE?

WE WERE ALL SWAL-LOWED UP BY IT.

HER SONG WAS THAT AMAZING.

BUT... NOBODY LAUGHED AT ME.

SO I LOOK LIKE I'VE BEEN CRYING ...

I WAS REALLY PATHETIC BEFORE.

GOSHI (RUB)

MOVING PEOPLE WITH MY MUSIC JUST DRIVES ME WILD!

HOW DO I PUT THIS ...?

HM?

...HOW COULD I POSSIBLY THROW IT AWAY!?

HM? WHAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU.

..... AWAY ?

SO? WILL YOU USE MY SONG OR NOT?

SO HOW'S IT GOING? WILL THE GAME BE READY?

TON (TOK)

THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF PRO-DUCTION THAT HAS THE FREEDOM TO REJECT FINISHED WORK.

AH HA HA HA! THEN I REALLY DO WIN, TOMO!

SO, TOMO...

...ONCE THE GAME'S DONE.....

...CAN EVERYONE REALLY BE HAPPY TOGETHER?

HUH ...?

WILL YOU BE IN TIME FOR THAT WINTER COMIC THING?

YEAH. PRETTY SOON...

LET'S FIND OUR HAPPINESS TOGETHER!

I FEEL LIKE ALMOST NOTHING'S CHANGED AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THIS CIRCLE.

OH YEEEAH?

WELL, WE ALL ALREADY GET ALONG.

DO YOU?

...WE CAN.

DON'T SAY STUFF LIKE THAT!

WELL, OKAY, BUT...

WOULDN'T THE TINIEST THING MAKE YOU FALL APART BEFORE YOU KNEW IT?

TOMO...

HOW COULD I STAND US FALLING APART?

UTAHA-SENPAI... ERIRI... MICHIRU... KATOU...

EVERY DAY'S BEEN LIKE A PARTY. I CAN'T GO BACK TO BEING A CONSUMER OTAKU WHO JUST PLAYS GAMES AND WATCHES ANIME BY HIMSELF.

NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, I'LL KEEP THIS CIRCLE GOING FOREVER.

WITH YOU IN IT TOO, OF COURSE.

...OR LIKE A ROCK BAND THAT REUNITES AFTER DECADES...

...IF WE COULD GET TOGETHER LIKE WE WERE HAVING CLASS REUNIONS...

...EVEN IF IT ISN'T EVERY DAY OR ALL THE TIME, IT'D BE JUST FINE...

...OR WE'RE BUSY...

...OR MOVE AWAY...

EVEN IF WE GRADUATE...

KA-TOU... DOES?

IT SEEMS KATOU-CHAN FEELS THAT WAY TOO.

WELL, IT'S NOT JUST YOU.

URK ...!

...ISN'T 'COS OF YOU, TOMO, BUT HER.

TO BE BLUNT, OUR CIRCLE DOING WELL RIGHT NOW...

ENEMY? HOW!?

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT ABOUT SUCH A HARMLESS PERSON!?

WHAT? YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT I MEAN ...!

I GET IT...

SHE'S OUR GREATEST ALLY... AND OUR GREATEST ENEMY.

GYAAAAH!!!

GA (GRIP)

.....OW!

KATOU IS OUR GREATEST ALLY AND OUR GREATEST ENEMY ...?

WHAT IN THE WORLD ...?

SOO (LOOM)

HOW CAN I~!?

BATA

OR WILL YOU HAVE THE RESOLVE TO RESIST AND PIN ME DOWN? HURRY UP AND DECIDE!

NOW, THEN, TOMO! ARE YOU HAPPY TO BE PREY TO MY APPETITE FOR DESTRUC-TION?

DOTA

I HAVEN'T PUT A CROSSFACE CHICKENWING ON ANYONE ALL WEEK, AND I JUST CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!

OOH, THIS FEELS SO GOOD!

BATA (FLAIL)

DOTA (BOP)

THE NEXT DAY

YOU'LL BE FINE! DON'T MOVE, TOMO. LEAVE IT ALL TO ME.

HERE WE GO!

... MMF!

B-BUT, THIS IS SO HUMILIATING!

C'MON! STOP CRYING! YOU'RE A BOY, AREN'T YOU!?

URGH... WAAAH... SNRF!

チラシッ

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TWO DOING!?

LABEL: MED STRIPS

WELL, EVEN I AGREE WITH HER ABOUT THAT...

YOU THINK SO? ISN'T THIS WHAT RELATIVES ARE LIKE?

OF ALL THE—! I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE COUSINS... THAT'S WAY TOO MUCH PHYSICAL CONTACT!

OW, OW, OW!

I HURT MY LOWER BACK... WHEN I WOKE UP, I COULDN'T MOVE!

TOMOYA, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.

SFX: KUTSUROGI!! (LAZE)

NO THANK YOU!

ANYWAY, YOU WANNA HAVE DINNER WITH US, SAWAMURA-CHAN?

?

I'M OKAY! I'M OKAY! I'M OKAY!

JAN

JAN

JAN

JAN (STRUM)

YOU ARE WAY TOO ATTACHED TO YOUR COUSIN!

I DON'T NEED TO HEAR THIS FROM SOMEONE WHO REGULARLY PUTS OUT SUPER-IMMORAL FAN COMICS!

I SWEAR, YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY NOTHING BUT NYMPHOS!

THE TOUCHING IS TOTALLY OVERBOARD, AND SHE SHOWS FAR TOO MUCH SKIN!

WATCH IT. BETTER NOT DISCLOSE THE NAMES OF ANY SPECIFIC AUTHORS LIKE THAT, OKAY?

THAT TYPE ALWAYS BLOWS THEIR DEADLINES AND RUINS THEIR OWN WORK BY GETTING CARRIED AWAY... OR THEY GET MAJOR WRITER'S BLOCK AND JUST MAKE TROUBLE FOR EVERYONE AROUND THEM!

I'M NOT LIKE UTAHA KASUMIGAOKA, FOR EXAMPLE, WHOSE ACTUAL SEX-CRAZED SELF COMES OUT IN ALL HER WORKS.

THAT'S A SINCERE RESPONSE TO MARKET DEMAND.

TRUE OR NOT, I LIKE WORKS WHERE THE WRITER'S CHARACTER CLEARLY COMES THROUGH.

I WORK OUT A CLEAR PLAN TO START. THEN I ACCURATELY DRAW THE FINISHED IMAGE FROM MY MIND AND CREATE A WORK THAT'S EXACTLY AS I ENVISIONED.

I'M NOT LIKE THEM.

WELL, ERIRI'S BOOKS ARE ALL LIKE THAT.

YEAH, IT'S ALL PLANNED... HOW IT BEGINS, HOW IT DEVELOPS, HOW IT ENDS... EVEN THE PAGE COUNT ...

THE SITUATIONS, THE HERO'S NUMBER OF C●● SHOTS, THE QUANTITY OF THE HEROINE'S ORG●●●S ...!

WHOA, WHOA, WHOA!!

THAT LAST EXAMPLE'S OKAY THOUGH, ISN'T IT?

I DON'T USE SUCH CRUDE PLOT DEVICES.

SUDDEN DEPRESSING DEVELOP-MENTS, UNEXPECTED GENRE SHIFTS, ABRUPT REUNIONS WITH PREVIOUS WOMEN...

THE CHARACTERS' BEHAVIOR DOESN'T CHANGE. THE STORY DOESN'T GO OFF IN ANY ODD DIRECTIONS.

GARI (SCRATCH)

GARI

STILL, SHE REALLY IS HUMBLE AND EARNEST ABOUT HER CREATIVE PROCESS.

WOW, IT SURE IS HARD TO DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN PREDICTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS, HUH!?

ALL RIGHT, THIS CONVER-SATION IS OVER!

EVEN IF YOU BETRAY THE AUDIENCE'S PREDICTIONS, YOU MUST NEVER BETRAY THEIR EXPECTATIONS.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE LAST SEASON OF ANIME SHOWS...

IT'S JUST ABOUT WHAT I LIKE.

...WELL, IT'S SIMPLY A MATTER OF DIFFERENT TYPES. IT'S NOT ABOUT GOOD OR BAD.

SHE MEETS EXPECTATIONS BUT DOESN'T EXCEED PREDICTIONS.

SHE CONSISTENTLY PUTS OUT WORKS IN BOTH QUANTITY AND WITH QUALITY.

THAT'S WHY I CAN LEAVE A JOB IN HER HANDS WITH A CLEAR MIND.

AND... THEY SELL WELL, NO MATTER WHAT.

THEY FOLLOW DEADLINES AND MAINTAIN QUALITY. COME CRUNCH TIME, THEY SHINE LIKE GODS. THEY KEEP WORKING WITHOUT GIVING UP. THEY ALWAYS STAY IN TOUCH, AND THEY KNOW HOW TO COMPROMISE WITH THE WORLD OUT THERE.

TO BE BLUNT, I ENVISION MY IDEAL CREATOR AS A COMBINATION OF THE BEST OF BOTH ERIRI AND UTAHA-SENPAI.

HM?

SO, TOMOYA, HERE'S WHAT I REALLY WANTED TO TALK ABOUT.

I WANT YOU TO REST EASY.

WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO IS ALL COMPLETELY CALCULATED TOO.

...NEVER MIND THE FACT THAT IT WAS THE ONLY OPTION I HAD.

PUTTING THESE TWO TOGETHER WAS GENIUS, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.

IT'LL BE FINE! I PROMISE I'LL SEND IN DAILY REPORTS!

GU (FWIP)

...WAIT.

.....NO, HANG ON!

AND I PROMISE I'LL LEAVE MY PHONE ON.

ALL THIS SETUP BEFORE SHE FINALLY GETS TO HER MAIN POINT...

I'VE ALREADY GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

END

OH, BUT WILL I ACTUALLY GET ANY SIGNAL OUT THERE?

CHAPTER 37

TH—

THE NASU HIGH-LAND!?

YEAH. WE HAVE A VACATION HOME THERE.

YOU CAME OUT THERE ONCE, DIDN'T YOU?

OH. YEAH.

FROM WHEN?

TODAY!

ACTU-ALLY, A CAR'S WAITING FOR ME OUTSIDE RIGHT NOW.

THE DEADLINE FOR THE MASTER IS THE END OF NEXT WEEK, RIGHT?

JAN

JAN (TWANG)

...YOU'RE GONNA SHUT YOURSELF IN UNTIL THEN?

AND IN EXCHANGE, I SWEAR I'LL BE ON TIME, SO TRUST ME, OKAY?

WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL?

WELL, IF I DON'T SKIP, I'M NOT GONNA MAKE IT.

THAT'S AN AWFUL WAY TO DEAL WITH IT! MAYBE DON'T!?

YES.

IF IT COMES DOWN TO IT, WE CAN MAKE A DONATION TO THE SCHOOL...

BUT CAN YOU MISS THAT MANY DAYS?

SO SHE'S GOING TO LOCK HERSELF AWAY THERE AND DO THEM IN ONE GO, HUH...?

ONE WEEK TO THE DEADLINE... TEN PIECES OF ART LEFT TO COMPLETE...

EVERY DAY OF YOUR LIFE IS BURIED IN LIES, ISN'T IT!?

IT'LL BE FINE, TOMOYA! BELIEVE IN ME, WHO YOU BELIEVE IN!

SHE'S BEEN A SHAM PRINCESS FOR EIGHT YEARS!

HAVE I EVER LIED BEFORE?

DURING THAT PERIOD, I WON'T BE ABLE TO MEET HER AND SPEAK TO HER DIRECTLY.

ALL I CAN DO IS HAVE FAITH IN ERIRI AND WAIT.

TEN PIECES IN ONE WEEK... THE ERI KASHIWAGI I KNOW COULD EASILY PULL OFF THAT NUMBER.

BUT WHY GO TO SUCH LENGTHS?

SO THAT I CAN BRACE MYSELF.

BRACE MYSELF TO BE THE FACE OF THIS CIRCLE.

ERIRI ...!

I SEE! SHE'S STARTING TO BECOME SELF-CONSCIOUS OF HER ROLE.

PULLING US ALL UP THROUGH THE STRENGTH OF HER ART— IT'S A FORM OF LEADER-SHIP!

IT'LL BE A BIG HELP TO US ALL. SHE'S DETER-MINED— EAGER, EVEN— TO MAKE THIS PROJECT A SUCCESS.

E-ERIRI ...!

THE DAY HAS FINALLY COME FOR THE LAST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE TO FALL INTO PLACE, ALL FOR OUR CIRCLE.

"ALL FOR ONE, AND ONE FOR ALL."

WE'LL GIVE IT OUR ALL. FRIENDS HELPING ONE ANOTHER, AIMING FOR VICTORY... THAT'S THE SPIRIT OF TEAM-WORK...

LEAVE IT TO ME, TOMOYA!

...SAY WHAT?

DISHI (CRACK)

IN ONE WEEK, I'LL HAVE CRUSHED EVERY FIBER OF UTAHA KASUMIGAOKA AND MICHIRU HYOUDOU FOR YOU.

THE TIP OF A PINKIE IS WORTH A LOT! YAKUZA USE THEM TO MAKE AMENDS!

SHE'S A GRAND-STANDIN' FIEND!

SO, NOW, I'M GONNA FLEX MY MUSCLES AND TEACH THE LOT OF YOU THAT YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE WORTH ABOUT AS MUCH AS THE TIP OF MY PINKIE.

THE SCENARIO AND MUSIC CONTRIBUTE ABOUT TEN PERCENT TO SALES AT MOST. SEEING MINOR PLAYERS ACT BIG IS REALLY PATHETIC.

I MEAN, THE CIRCLE, AND I JUST CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE.

LATELY... THOSE NOBODIES ARE GETTING A LITTLE TOO EAGER TO SERVE YOU—

ERIRI ...

WELL, I'M HALF JOKING. I'D BETTER GET GOING.

I'LL BE IN TOKUNOSHIMA.

I PROMISE I'LL E-MAIL YOU EVERY DAY, AND I WILL COME BACK.

...TO THIS TOWN, WHEREVER YOU'RE WAITING, TOMOYA.

...I UNDER-STAND. I'LL BE WAITING.

PLEASE DO, TOMOYA.

OH ...!

TEE HEE HEE HEE!

WH-WHAT!?

WHAT IS IT?

IF ANYONE WERE LISTENING TO THIS...

...IT'D SOUND LIKE A LONG-DISTANCE ROMANCE, HUH?

WHA —!?

GOING THAT FAR JUST TO TEASE ME...!

BUT I KNOW IT'S TIMES LIKE THESE WHEN ERIRI IS TRULY STRONG.

SHE'LL FINISH THE ART, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

...IS IT YOUR FAULT!?

BATAN (SHUT)

HM? WHAT'S THAT!? I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

JAN (STRUM)

JAN

MAIN THEME SONG FROM ○ CENTIMETERS PER SECOND

AND SO, ERIRI'S SOLITARY BATTLE BEGAN.

AHHHH (BUZZ)

SO, THEN...

...WHY DO I FEEL THIS VAGUE SENSE OF UNEASE?

From: "Eriri Sawamura" <e-lily@○○○.○○>
To: "Tomoya" <T-AKI@○○○.○○>
Subject: Today's Work
Date: Sun, Dec ○○ 7:11 P.M.

Hey there.
It's been a full day since I arrived here.
I've finished my shopping, and my driver's gone back,
so now I'm all alone.
It's so cold outside that Tokyo doesn't even compare.
But every room in the house is heated, so it's warmer
than your place.
So, anyway, I finished two pieces today that I've attached.
This leaves three more for the Ruri route and eight more in total.
If they need any revisions, reply by tomorrow.

Although, if I'm not interrupted, I can focus and
make better progress...

At this rate, I might be back by Friday.

Hey.
Artwork received.
I've checked them, and neither need any corrections.
They're good to go.
I'll stick them into the game right away.
You can just throw yourself into the eight left.
Remember to mind your health.
I realize this must be a lot of pressure,
but try to get some sleep, okay?
Are you eating properly?

<< But every room in the house is heated,
so it's warmer than your place. >>
What a waste of energy! Just heat your own room, you bourgeois!

...SHE LOCKED HERSELF AWAY?

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS, WE WON'T BE ABLE TO REACH HER VERY QUICKLY!

WILL SHE BE OKAY ALL ALONE DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS AND AWAY FROM CIVILIZATION?

DIDN'T ERIRI TELL HER?

PATAN (SHUT)

IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY, IS IT?

SHE'S IN A TOWN WITH CONVENIENCE STORES AND STUFF.

YOU'RE AWFULLY RELAXED ABOUT THIS, AKI-KUN...

IF SHE SAYS SHE'S OKAY, THEN SHE IS.

WHEN SHE'S IN A JAM, SHE COMES TO ME WITHOUT CARING HOW MUCH IT TROUBLES ME.

DO YOU TRUST HER, AKI-KUN?

WELL, SHE'S SHOWING MORE SELF-CONTROL THAN I'D EXPECTED. WHATEVER HAPPENS, I THINK SHE'LL PULL THROUGH.

WELL, IN HER CONSISTENCY ANYWAY...

SHE WORKS HARD, AND SHE GETS INTENSE, BUT SHE DOESN'T LET IT OVER-WHELM HER.

THE PLAN IS FOR THE END OF THIS WEEK.

SO WHEN WILL SHE REJOIN SOCIETY?

...I MEAN, SHE'LL EVEN CAST ME ASIDE WHEN SHE NEEDS TO, JUST FOR THAT PIECE OF MIND.

WHENEVER ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HER IN LIFE, SHE FINDS A WAY TO DEAL WITH IT.

OH, I SEE. HARD TO DO IN ONE DAY, HUH?

GO UP THERE ...?

TO NASU HIGH-LAND?

SO SHOULD WE GO SEE HOW SHE'S DOING ON SATURDAY, AKI-KUN?

AND BRING ERIRI BACK WITH US?

OKAY... WHY DON'T WE GET HER TO LET US STAY ONE NIGHT AND THEN COME BACK ON SUNDAY?

AKI-KUN?

.....

OH, I SEE. SO THERE'S STILL QUITE A BIT OF WORK LEFT TO BE DONE.

ONCE WE'VE GOT ALL THE ELEMENTS, I NEED TO ASSEMBLE THEM, TEST IT, AND PREPARE THE MASTER FOR DELIVERY...

N-NO... THE WEEKEND'S NO GOOD FOR ME. I HAVE TO FINISH THE MASTER.

DID SHE JUST SUGGEST AN OVERNIGHT TRIP WITH ONE BOY AND TWO GIRLS!?

OH... THANKS ...

SO, I'M SORRY, BUT IF YOU'RE GOING THERE, IT'LL HAVE TO BE ALONE ...

HM... WELL, I WON'T GO EITHER, THEN.

I CAN'T LET YOU DO ALL THAT WORK BY YOURSELF.

From: "Eriri Sawamura" <e-l
To: "Tomoya" <T-AKI@○○○.○
Subject: Day Two
Date: Mon, Dec ○○ 9:01 P.

Hey.
Sending you today's work.

SIX PIECES LEFT!

GREAT WORK, ERIRI!

Subject:
Date: 9:01 P.M.

Hi.
Sem
Toda rk.
rou one more for the Ruri
Doin
So th
more- aybe we could even add
I know route.
that num g I said no way, but maybe
Something to consider maybe. wings is too few?

<< Are you eating properly? >>
It's cool. I bought a box of Pe○○○ng instant yakisoba.

SHE'S ATTACHED HER PROGRESS. TWO MORE PIECES TODAY.

THE WAY SHE'S GOING, I WONDER IF I COULD ASK FOR EVEN MORE?

From: "Tomoya Aki" <T AKI@○○○.○○>
To: "Eriri Sawamura" <e-lily@○○○.○○>

Day Two
ec ○○ 11:55 P.M.

k looks totally perfect again.
thing, I'll get it done tomorro
another.
ur current pace...is what I w
aybe you're rushing a bit too
g yourself too hard?
ing more art, why don't we t
once we've finished what w
r the Ruri route ending?

<< It's cool. I bought a box of Pe○○○ng instant yakisoba. >>
I'm in no position to preach, but you should really be eating healthier...

"AS FOR ADDING MORE ART, WHY DON'T WE THINK ABOUT THAT ONCE WE'VE FINISHED WHAT WE PLANNED?"

"ARTWORK LOOKS TOTALLY PERFECT AGAIN."

Mmm (BUZZ)

THANKS FOR MEETING ME LIKE THIS.

UM...

I'M SO SORRY, TOMOYA-SENPAI...

?

THEN WHAT?

UMM, THAT'S NOT WHY I'M APOLOGIZING.

IT'S NO BIG DEAL. I DON'T HAVE ANY CIRCLE MEETINGS TODAY OR ANYTHING.

OUR CONTEST ISN'T THAT SERIOUS! IT'S JUST A FAIR-AND-SQUARE COMPETITION, RIGHT!?

GUSU (SNIFF)

I FELT LIKE I NEEDED TO SEE YOU, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE A SWORN ENEMY AGAINST WHOM I'VE THROWN MYSELF IN A MERCILESS BATTLE WHERE THE LOSER WILL BE CAST OUT OF THE INDUSTRY FOREVER...

NO, EVEN IF I COULD HAVE HIS LIFE IN THE PALM OF MY HANDS, I WOULDN'T BE HAPPY! AND IF IT WERE THE OTHER WAY AROUND, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO PASS ON TO THE AFTERLIFE!

SO, I FELT KIND OF ENVIOUS OF YOU TWO FOR BEING ABLE TO COMPETE WITH SUCH PASSION.

OH, WELL, YOU SEE ...

GOSO (DIG)

SO, WHAT DID YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT TODAY?

IN OUR CIRCLE MEETING, ONII-CHAN SAID THAT TO THE MEMBERS AND GOT US ALL RILED UP. I DEFINITELY THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE SERIOUSLY FIGHTING...

OH. REALLY?

TOMOYA-SENPAI—

PLEASE ACCEPT THIS!

BAAAN (BAM)

ANOTHER MISLEADING WAY TO HAND THINGS OVER.

!

WHAT IS THIS ...?

I WANT YOU TO TAKE IT, SENPAI... IT'S MY FIRST TIME.

"THE FIRST GAME SHE'S MADE"... THAT'S WHAT I TOOK.

THANK YOU...

I SEE... SO, ROUGE EN ROUGE HAS FINISHED THEIR GOLD MASTER ALREADY.

WAIT, YOU MEAN, BLESSING SOFTWARE'S STILL ISN'T DONE YET?

?

OH .....

SURE OPENED THAT CAN OF WORMS!

THE GOLD MASTER OF OUR NEW DOUJIN GAME. I FINISHED IT LAST NIGHT.

ETERNAL AND EPHEMERAL EVANGILE!

B-BUT I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU MADE IT ON TIME, IZUMI-CHAN!

AT SUMMER COMIKET, YOUR COVER WASN'T READY IN TIME AND WAS JUST WHITE, AND THE COMIC ITSELF WAS JUST ROUGHS FROM THE MIDDLE ON.

GAH! STOP! PLEASE STOP SAYING THAT!

BUT ACTUALLY, I LEARNED A LOT FROM WORKING ON THIS PROJECT.

UNTIL NOW, I ONLY DREW WHAT I WANTED, AS MUCH AS I WANTED, WHEN I WANTED.

IT WAS JUST A HOBBY TO ME.

OH, IT WAS HORRIBLE! IF HE WEREN'T FAMILY, I WOULD QUIT THE CIRCLE!

PUKUU (POUT)

AH... AH-HA-HA...!

BUT THAT BEING THE CASE, IF I CARRIED ON WITH IT AS A HOBBY, I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO COMPETE AT A HIGH LEVEL.

...IORI WORKED YOU HARD, HUH?

HAAAH!

I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU HAD A FALLING OUT WITH HIM! HE'S REALLY UNBELIEVABLE!

HE WOULD SPEND FIVE SECONDS LOOKING AT A DRAWING I SPENT A WHOLE DAY WORKING ON AND THEN MAKE ME REDO IT.

ONII-CHAN IS REALLY VICIOUS WHEN IT COMES TO THIS BUSINESS STUFF!

I DON'T UNDER-STAND HIM AT ALL!

WHAT'S MORE, THE ONLY REASON HE GIVES IS "THIS WON'T SELL"!

WHEN I ASK, "WHAT SHOULD I DO?" HE SAYS, "HOW SHOULD I KNOW?"

HUH...? SHE ACTUALLY SEEMS...

IT'S REALLY SUCH A PAIN...

OH, OF COURSE...

AND EVEN WHEN HE ASKS FOR DO-OVERS, HE DOESN'T EXTEND THE DEADLINES. MEANWHILE, HE'S OFF HANGING OUT WITH DIFFERENT WOMEN EVERY DAY...

IN THAT CASE, HE CAN DIE FOR ALL I CARE. SCRATCH THAT—I HOPE HE DROPS DEAD!

THAT'S RIGHT. A PRODUCER IS A ROLE TAKEN ON BY THOSE WITHOUT THE TALENT TO BE CREATORS...

BUT OF COURSE HE WOULDN'T. HE CAN'T DRAW AT ALL.

...LIKE ME.

THERE'S SOME WARMTH IN IZUMI-CHAN'S WORDS.

I DON'T MIND...

OH! SORRY, SENPAI! I'VE BEEN COMPLAINING NONSTOP!

...MEANING HE'S MAINTAINING A GOOD PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT.

...IORI HAS PROPER CONTROL OVER HIS STAFF, ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM COMPLAIN SERIOUSLY...

AND...

SHE'S STILL FULL OF SISTERLY LOVE FOR IORI.

WILL DO...

AND WHEN OUR GOLD MASTER IS DONE, PLEASE PLAY IT IN TURN!

ANY-WAY!

THIS WORK IS THE FRUIT OF OUR LABOR.

SO PLEASE PLAY IT AND LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

HUH? WHY?

TO BE HONEST... I WAS A LITTLE NERVOUS ABOUT SEEING YOU TODAY, TOMOYA-SENPAI.

WHOA, WHOA, WHOA!?

AH HA HA HA HA HA!

...AND THEY'D TRAMPLE ON THE GAME DVD I BROUGHT AND SHOVE ME DOWN INTO A PUDDLE OF MUD, AND AFTER THAT, SHE'D POINT AND LAUGH AT ME— BWAAAAH...!

...AND SAY, "IT'S TEN YEARS TOO SOON FOR YOU TO BE HAVING PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH TOMOYA!" AND THEY'D ALL SWEAR AT US...

...AND SHE'D BRING ALONG A BUNCH OF HER HENCHMEN TO OUR MEETING PLACE AHEAD OF US...

I WAS WORRIED SAWAMURA-SENPAI...

...WAS SECRETLY CHECKING YOUR MAIL...

HUH? HOW COME?

WELL, ERIRI WON'T BE INTERFERING TODAY. THAT I CAN GUARANTEE.

AS ALWAYS, HER CHARACTER CHANGES WHEN IT COMES TO ERIRI.

TH-THAT'S OKAY.

HFF!

HFF!

HFF!

I-I'M SORRY FOR GETTING SO WORKED UP.

AND AS SAWAMURA-SENPAI, THE MADONNA OF SHIMAMURA MIDDLE SCHOOL.

SHE'S AFRAID OF YOU. IN A CERTAIN SENSE, SHE RESPECTS YOU, AS THE POPULAR DOUJIN ARTIST ERI KASHIWAGI.

WELL, THAT'S UP TO YOU.

OR SHOULD I BE TROUBLED?

...SO SHOULD I FEEL HONORED BY THAT?

'COS SHE'S OCCUPIED WITH HER OWN BUSINESS.

RIGHT NOW, SHE'S THINKING OF NOTHING BUT HOW TO BEAT YOU.

ACK! SO SHE DOES HATE ME, DOESN'T SHE!?

NEITHER WILL I!

I'M TOTALLY CONFIDENT WE'VE MADE SOMETHING AMAZING!

...AND OUR CIRCLE AREN'T GOING TO LOSE, GOT IT?

BUT, IZUMI-CHAN... EVEN SO, ERI KASHI-WAGI...

...HEE HEE!

...HERE'S TO A GOOD FIGHT... SIR!

WELL, THEN, SENPAI...

GOOD. THAT'S THE IZUMI HASHIMA I KNOW... THE ARTIST I WAS CRAZIEST ABOUT LAST YEAR.

WHAT'S THIS, NOW ...?

"FROM ERIRI SAWA-MURA—

"I'M ATTACHING TODAY'S WORK. IT'S ONLY ONE PIECE THOUGH."

SIGN: KAMEDA CAFE

SO, COME ON, ERIRI.

I DECLARED WAR IN YOUR PLACE. I SERIOUSLY NEED THAT ART...

"FROM TOMOYA AKI—

"I'VE CHECKED THE ART. RURI'S EXPRESSION WHILE CONTEMPLATING HAPPINESS IS AWESOME.

"SO THAT'S IT FOR RURI'S ROUTE, THEN. THANK YOU."

"I'LL START CONCEPTUALIZING MY WORK FOR THE GRAND ROUTE."

"IT'S DIFFERENT FROM THE SCENARIOS SO FAR, SO MAYBE A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS NEEDED."

PLEASE DON'T SNATCH MY PHONE AND THEN SUDDENLY JUMP TO HOPELESS CONCLUSIONS!

I SEE. THIS IS A LONG-DISTANCE ROMANCE ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT...

...AND THE MORE TIME PASSES, THE MORE DISTANT YOU'LL BECOME, JUST LIKE IN *O CENTIMETERS PER SECOND.*

SAWAMURA-SAN'S TONE IS GETTING TENSER. SHE'S CLEARLY GETTING ANNOYED BY YOUR COMMENTS, RINRI-KUN.

<< ...but maybe you're rushing a bit too much and pushing yourself too hard? >>
<< As for adding more art, why don't we think about that once we've finished what we planned for the Ruri route ending? >>

I'm the type to set my own pace.
If you don't set the piece count soon, I can't proceed.

BUT SEE... LOOK AT THE BACK-AND-FORTHS UP UNTIL TODAY.

DON'T GO JUDGING! DON'T HACK ME TO PIECES SO CALMLY! AND DON'T PASS A DEATH SENTENCE SO CASUALLY!

THIS IS TOTALLY THE PATTERN WHEN A WOMAN'S ABOUT TO BREAK UP WITH YOU.

YOU NOTICED IT TOO. YOU START TIPTOEING AROUND IN YOUR REPLIES MORE AND ACTING ALL HUMBLE...

<< I'm the type to set my own pace. >>
<< If you don't set the piece count soon, I can't proceed. >>

Well, five pieces for the grand route is fine, then. Please don't overstress yourself.

F-FATAL!?

AS OUR DIRECTOR, YOU'VE COMMITTED A FATAL ERROR.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU LET A CREATOR ON THE VERGE OF A DEADLINE OUT INTO THE WILD...

I THINK I HEARD THAT, BUT THERE'S NO WAY I'M ASKING HER TO REPEAT IT!

ANYWAY, SAWAMURA-SAN WILL DEFINITE-LY RUN FROM OUR CIRCLE I'D BET MY (BEEP) ON IT.

YOU'RE SO NAIVE, RINRI-KUN.

B-BUT ERIRI SAID IF SHE DIDN'T DO THIS, SHE WOULDN'T MAKE IT IN TIME...

CERTAIN PATTERNS IN E-MAILS AND PHONE CALLS ARE SIGNS THAT A CREATOR IS ON THE LAM.

THIS IS SOMETHING I HEARD FROM A *CERTAIN* EDITOR...

SHE COULD JUST SAY "MACHIDA-SAN.

THAT'S NOT ACTUALLY TRUE, AND THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HOW I TREAT YOU, UTAHA-SENPA— OW, OW, OW, OW!

GUGUGU (DIG)

IN THE FIRST PLACE, YOU'RE TOO SOFT ON SAWAMURA-SAN FOR BEING SO UNREASONABLE, EGOTISTIC, AND SO SELFISHLY BLATANT IN HER ULTERIOR MOTIVES...

...AND YET, I NEVER HEAR YOUR SOFT WHISPERS...

FIRST, LEVEL ONE—THEIR LANGUAGE GETS SORT OF ERRATIC.

THEN COMES LEVEL TWO—THEY START CRITICIZING THEMSELVES. THEN IT'S LEVEL THREE—REPLIES COME LATER AND LATER.

LEVEL FOUR—THEY IGNORE THEIR SURROUNDINGS AND CONTINUALLY SAY SELF-PITYING THINGS LIKE "I WANT TO DIE" AND "I'M USELESS."

AND FINALLY, LEVEL FIVE—SUDDENLY, ONE DAY, ALL CONTACT COMPLETELY STOPS.

RIGHT NOW, SAWAMURA-SAN IS ALREADY AT LEVEL ONE.

IT'S CLEAR AS DAY THAT SHE'LL BE MOVING INTO LEVEL TWO AND THREE SOON ENOUGH.

END

CHAPTER
32

SHE'S ALREADY... AT DANGER LEVEL ONE?

THERE'S A BONUS LEVEL S.X. EVEN IF YOU SEARCH LIKE CRAZY FOR A MISSING FEMALE CREATOR...

...SHE'S OFTEN BACK AT HER PARENTS' HOUSE, NOT WORKING OR STUDYING... OR SHE'S CHANGED HER PEN NAME AND HER MAN, ALREADY DOING ANOTHER JOB AND FEELING PRETTY GOOD.

SO, MACHIDA-SAN'S FEELING IS, THE MAN WHO GOT DUMPED DOESN'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT HER TOO MUCH.

SORRY, DID YOU REALLY NEED TO DESCRIBE THAT LAST ONE?

WELL, IN ANY CASE, IT'S CLEAR AS DAY THAT SHE'LL BE MOVING INTO LEVEL TWO AND THREE SOON ENOUGH.

TH-THAT'S RIDICU-LOUS ...!

GAGAGAGAGAGU (DIG?)

...BUT HAVE YOU BEEN WATCHING HER EVERY SECOND?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN—

B-BUT THAT'S NEVER HAPPENED TO HER EVEN ONCE SINCE SHE STARTED PARTICI-PATING IN EVENTS.

AN ARTIST CAN LOSE THEIR ABILITY TO CREATE IN AN INSTANT. THEY MIGHT NOT EVEN KNOW WHEN THEY'LL BE ABLE TO CREATE AGAIN.

THE OFFSET-PRINTED BOOKS' COVERS WERE ALWAYS IN COLOR, AND EVEN THE EVENT-EXCLUSIVE BONUS BOOKS SHE CREATED WERE FULLY INKED.

OF THOSE DOUJINSHI, NOT A SINGLE ONE SEEMED INCOMPLETE (GOING SOLELY BY THE COVERS).

R-18

THAT'S WHY I HAVEN'T READ THEM, BUT OUT OF RESPECT FOR ER RI, I DO STILL KEEP THEM UNDER MY BED.

BUT SAWAMURA-SAN'S ARE MOSTLY ALL OVER EIGHTEEN, AREN'T THEY?

ERIRI'S FOLKS BRING HER BOOKS TO EVERY EVENT!

IT'S A LOVABLE SHORT-COMING THAT SHE SOMETIMES GETS ME TO HELP HER OUT WHEN SHE'S ON THE VERGE OF A DEAD-LINE...

...BUT EVEN SO, IT'S LIKE SHE ALWAYS ENJOYS THAT LAST-MINUTE RUSH, AND SHE ALWAYS MAKES IT IN TIME.

SHE'LL DEFINITELY COME BACK TO THIS WORLD.

SHE WON'T LOSE CONTROL. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, SHE CALCULATES EXACTLY WHAT SHE NEEDS TO DO.

.....DO YOU TAKE HER FOR A FOOL?

HUH?

WHY ARE YOU TREATING HER LIKE A CREATOR WITH NO FUTURE?

SOCIABILITY, HUMANITY, COOPERATION WITH OTHERS, THE ABILITY TO HAVE A LIFE, EVEN OUR SLEEP HOURS—

WE SACRIFICE EVERY-THING AND POUR IT ALL INTO IMPROVING OUR WORK! WE'RE ALL ●●●●S!

BUT WE ARE FOOLS!

I'M NOT...

AREN'T YOU THE ONE TAKING CREATORS FOR FOOLS?

NO, THAT'S NOT TRUE. THERE ARE LOTS OF CREATORS WHO CAN JUGGLE BOTH THEIR PRIVATE AND PRO LIVES FINE!

BUT WHEN WE PUT OUR HUMANITY AND OUR CREATIVITY ON THE SCALES, WE'LL CHOOSE THE LATTER WITHOUT HESITATION!

THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, RIGHT?

SAWAMURA-SAN WILL NEVER BE RECKLESS. IF SHE HITS A WALL, SHE'LL TURN RIGHT BACK AROUND INSTEAD OF TRYING TO OVERCOME IT...

WHAT DOES?

WH—

THIS ISN'T ABOUT ME, BUT IT IRRITATES ME...

.....KUH!

THE ABSURD FACT THAT I, WHO AM SUPPOSED TO HATE ERIRI SAWAMURA, HOLD ERI KASHIWAGI IN FAR GREATER ESTEEM...

...THAN YOU, THE PERSON WHO IS SUPPOSED TO UNDERSTAND HER BEST.

UTAHA-SENPAI... IT'S LIKE SHE'S ERIRI'S GREATEST ALLY RIGHT NOW.

IT'S LIKE...

...THE WAY TAKI LOOKS AT UTAKO KASUMI.

B-BUT EVEN I...

EVEN I THINK SHE'S TRULY AMAZING!

OBJEC-TIVELY, YOU MEAN .....?

KATA (CLACK)

AFTER THAT, I KEPT GETTING UPDATES FROM ERIRI, BUT...

...JUST AS UTAHA-SENPAI SAID...

"SORRY, NO PROGRESS TODAY...

"I TRIED TO DRAW SEVERAL PIECES, BUT THEY DIDN'T WORK FOR ME.

"WAIT JUST ONE MORE DAY, THEN I'LL BE BACK TO MY PACE OF TWO DAILY."

...ERIRI SEEMS TO BE GETTING ODDER WITH EACH PASSING DAY.

AND THEN...

...NO MORE NEWS.

HUH?

UMM, SO, HOW ARE THINGS COMING ALONG?

GATAN (KADUNK)

GATAN

NO PROGRESS SINCE TUESDAY NIGHT. THE RURI ROUTE IS FINISHED.

AH...

IT'S LIKE SHE'S AN ILLUSTRATOR UP IN THE CLOUDS.

GEE, TIMES LIKE THESE CAN BE REALLY TRYING.

WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT ERIRI'S STRUGGLING WITH, AND WE CAN'T GIVE HER ANY ADVICE.

AH, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, YOU'RE RIGHT.

ESPECIALLY THAT TIME AT ROKUTENBA MALL...

.....HEY, KATOU, HOW DID YOU GET TO BE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS WITH ERIRI?

YOU DIDN'T GEL AT FIRST, RIGHT?

BUT YEAH... I GUESS IT'S 'COS I MIGHT'VE GOTTEN TO KNOW THE REAL ERIRI LATELY?

HM? YOU WENT THERE WITH ERIRI TOO?

OH! YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA. SORRY, AKI-KUN. YOU'RE MISTAKEN ABOUT THAT ONE THING.

HER VOICE IS SO MONO-TONE, IT'S GIVING HER PERSON-ALITY ...?

SO, FROM ALL YOU'VE SAID, I TAKE IT YOU LOOK DOWN ON HER BEHAVIOR AFTER ALL.

WELL, SHE'S TWISTED IN A STRAIGHT-FORWARD WAY, AND SHE'S HARD TO DEAL WITH IN A WAY THAT'S EASY TO UNDER-STAND...

THE REAL ERIRI...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

...AND SHE'LL NEVER BETRAY A PERSON SHE'S OPENED HER HEART TO.

AND YOU, AKI-KUN... I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU IN THE PAST, BUT WHY DON'T WE JUST TRUST ERIRI AS SHE IS NOW?

.....HA HA!

IT'S ALREADY GETTING AROUND THAT ERIRI'S A FANGIRL AND A PHONY PRINCESS!

BUT SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO HIDE IT MUCH LONGER, YOU KNOW.

SHE'S ACTUALLY AN EROTIC DOUJIN ARTIST, BUT SHE ACTS LIKE A PRINCESS AND HIDES THAT SHE'S AN OTAKU.

BUT SHE'S STILL LYING TO EVERY-ONE ABOUT HER-SELF.

PLEASE, YOU DON'T NEED TO BELITTLE YOURSELF LIKE THAT.

WELL, ANYONE CAN SEE I'M ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS, OR RATHER, AN UNDERLING.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

SHE'S BEEN WEAR-ING THAT FACADE FOR EIGHT YEARS!

WOULD SHE BE THAT CARE-LESS?

NO WAY .....

AND IT SEEMS LIKE THE CAUSE WAS US BECOMING FRIENDS.

SO WITH ME BEING YOUR UNDERLING AND ERIRI BECOMING MY FRIEND, RUMORS STARTED GOING AROUND BASED ON THAT CONNECTION.

WHY NOT? US ASIDE, REGULAR STUDENTS WOULD BE EASILY FOOLED BY HER SMOOTH TALK...

THEY WON'T.

.....BUT THAT'S IDLE SPECU-LATION.

IF ERIRI DENIED IT, THE RUMORS WOULD VANISH LIKE SMOKE.

ERIRI ISN'T DENYING IT!

SAYS WHAT?

...BUT EVEN SO, SHE NEVER SAYS IT.

SHE GIVES THEM A VAGUE SMILE AND EVADES A LITTLE...

SHE NEVER, EVER SAYS THAT.

THAT SHE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU...

WHAT THE HELL?

WHY NOW ...?

I'M CERTAIN YOU AND ERIRI WILL TRULY BE ABLE TO MAKE AMENDS SOON ENOUGH.

SO, WE ABSOLUTELY NEED TO DO WHAT WE CAN FOR HER RIGHT NOW, OKAY?

DON'T SPEAK SO RASHLY, KATOU...

...HOW MUCH I STILL HOLD ON TO WHAT SHE DID TO ME...

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MUCH I RESENT HER...

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY, TOMO-KUN...

!...

!...

...COULDN'T KEEP MY PROMISE. I'M SO...

...SORRY.

HFF!
HFF!
HFF!
A DREAM...!?
!!
GABA (JUMP)
GAAAH!
WHAT DO I DO...? DELIVER THE MASTER WITHOUT THEM...?
GO (GLUG)
GO
GO
WHAT'S NOT DONE ARE THE FIVE IMAGES FOR THE GRAND ROUTE...
400P
ONE DAY UNTIL THE GOLD MASTER IS DUE...
GA (GRAB)
WHAT'S GOING ON... ERIRI?
OH!
PWAAH!
WITHOUT THE SCENARIO I POURED MY SOUL INTO, THE ONE UTAHA-SENPAI ACKNOWL-EDGED...?

WHAAA —!? ERIRI!!!!?

DOOON (BAM)

Y!!

n: "Eriri Sawamura"<e-lily@○○○.○
"Tomoya" <T-AKI@○○○.○○>
bje ubject
4:00 A.M.

I saw the sea today.
I'm not afraid anymore.

I WONDERED IF MAYBE YOU WERE ALSO BEING PRESSED INTO SOME DIFFICULT DECISIONS RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

UHH...

SO, SORRY TO BUG YOU WHEN YOU'RE BUSY, BUT HOW IS THE ART COMING?

NO, NO. DON'T BE IRRITATED.

ごほん AHEM!

DON'T DO ANYTHING TO LOWER HER MOTI-VATION...

That's your only reason for sending that e-mail? It froze my very body and soul!

GAAA (ROAR)

R-really!?

WELL...

...I THINK I'LL BE IN TIME.

Huh?

I TRIED CHANGING THE DRAWING STYLE FOR THESE ILLUSTRATIONS!

OH REALLY!?

Actually, a good idea popped into my head today.

WOW. SO SHE WAS OUT OF TOUCH JUST 'COS SHE WAS SO INTO HER WORK?

!?

Five.

HOW MANY PIECES DO YOU HAVE LEFT?

HANG ON A SECOND. YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR DRAWING STYLE NOW?

THAT SOUNDS RECK-LESS...

MAYBE I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PULL IT OFF!

AH HA HA!

GISHI (CREAK)

I CAN DO IT! I CAN!

KI (SCREE)

!?

IF YOU'RE EXPECTING IT OF ME, TOMOYA, THEN I CAN DO IT...

I CAN DO IT!

I GET THAT, BUT... DON'T YOU THINK... YOU'RE GOING OVERBOARD?

EVEN IF YOU CAN'T MAKE THE DEADLINE, I CAN SORT SOMETHING OUT ON MY END.

WE CAN CUT OUT THE GRAND ROUTE—

No!

ERIRI ...?

SCRAPPING IT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION!

IT'S TOTALLY CLUMSY, BUT IT'S SO MOVING! I CRIED WITH JOY!

I FELT SO HAPPY!

LISTEN, TOMOYA. I'M GONNA BE HONEST, OKAY? I'M NEVER GONNA SAY THIS AGAIN AS LONG AS I LIVE, OKAY?

THIS ROUTE THAT YOU WROTE IS THE ONE I LIKE THE MOST!

I LOVE IT!

So I'm drawing it! And I'm trying so hard to come up with a new way of drawing it that it's put me behind.

Wait for me, Tomoya... I'll have something amazing for you by tomorrow, I swear!

O...

...KAY.

GIMME A PEP TALK.

!

But can you do one thing for me?

OKAY. WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?

SAY IT.

TELL ME, "YOU CAN DO IT FOR SURE 'COS IT'S YOU." "YOU'RE TRULY INCREDIBLE." "YOU'RE A GENIUS." "THAT'S WHY YOU'LL DEFINITELY WIN."

The way you talk to Utaha Kasumigaoka, and Michiru Hyoudou, and Izumi Hoshima...

UH .....

Yeah. You can do this, Eriri... 'cos it's you.

So do it the way you want to! And I'll find a way to make it work.

ERIRI ...

.....

GOOD ...

HER VOICE IS...

... KIND.

AND TOUGH.

I'LL DO IT.....

... TOMOYA.

..... 'KAY.

UNDER-STOOD.

SHE DOESN'T NEED TO BORROW STRENGTH FROM ME ANYMORE.

Okay... See ya!

PU (CLICK)

HA (GASP)

ERI-RI!

CALL ENDED

TO BE CONTINUED

How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

THE "MEGU-TAN, IF YOU CAN'T HAVE A PERSONALITY THAT STANDS OUT RIGHT AWAY, THEN WHY NOT WORK ON YOUR APPEARANCE FIRST!" SECTION ☆

A SHORT SKIRT AGAIN...

PART 6 SHRINE MAIDEN

TRANSLATION NOTES

PAGE 19
"You—both of you—are my wings." This is the final line spoken by Alto Saotome, the main hero of the 2008 science fiction anime *Macross Frontier*. It's delivered simultaneously to his two love interests, Ranka Lee and Sheryl Nome. The line has come to symbolize ending a love triangle indecisively. Love triangles are considered one of the key components of the *Macross* franchise, along with popular music and giant robot space warfare.

PAGE 29
Yakisoba is a Japanese stir-fried noodle dish that typically includes a savory sauce, meat, and cabbage. It is a common dish found at street vendors and festivals.

PAGE 29
Takoyaki are panfried balls of batter that typically have chunks of octopus in them but can include other fillings. They are also commonly found at street vendors and festivals. *Tako* means "octopus" in Japanese.

PAGE 57
While dating sims and visual novels are designed to have multiple endings and possibilities, one of these is generally labeled the **true ending**, essentially the canon conclusion. Having three true endings is highly unusual.

PAGE 62
Convenience store bento in Japan are quick box lunches, purchased from 24/7 convenience stores. In contrast to the image of convenience store lunch as low quality in the United States and elsewhere, convenience store bento are actually quite tasty, with a wide selection offered at most stores.

COMMON HONORIFICS
no honorific: Indicates familiarity or closeness; if used without permission or reason, addressing someone in this manner would constitute an insult.
-san: The Japanese equivalent of Mr./Mrs./Miss. If a situation calls for politeness, this is the fail-safe honorific.
-sama: Conveys great respect; may also indicate that the social status of the speaker is lower than that of the addressee.
-kun: Used most often when referring to boys, this indicates affection or familiarity. Occasionally used by older men among their peers, but it may also be used by anyone referring to a person of lower standing.
-chan (also *-tan*): An affectionate honorific indicating familiarity used mostly in reference to girls; also used in reference to cute persons or animals of either gender.
-senpai: An honorific used to address upperclassmen or more experienced coworkers.
-sensei: A respectful honorific for teachers, artists, or high-level professionals.

PAGE 9
Japanese school festivals, especially in anime and other popular media, usually end with a **folk dance**, a dance around a bonfire. Boys and girls hold hands while dancing, giving it an air of romance.

PAGE 11
Megumi saying, **"Y-you idiot! Why would I be watching you!?"** is another example of her mimicking typical behavior of a *tsundere*—a character whose feelings for another typically go from *tsuntsun* ("cold") to *deredere* ("affectionate"). Originally, the term referred to a character who started off antagonistic but gradually fell in love but is now more commonly used for characters who flip-flop between the two.

TRANSLATION NOTES

PAGE 63
"She's in berserker worker mode!" In the Japanese edition, this is a play on words between "berserk" (*baasaku*) and "creation" (*sousaku*).

PAGE 67
Yandere are a variation on the *tsundere* character type. In contrast to a *tsundere*, who switches between being standoffish and affectionate, a *yandere* goes from loving to dangerously violent. Frequently, this is portrayed as the result of infatuation so strong that rejection or jealousy can lead to physical harm.

PAGE 77
Tamasaki and **Wagoushi** are thinly veiled plays on the actual Japanese cities of Saitama and Wako, both located in Saitama Prefecture.

PAGE 91
Kameda Café is a reference to the Japanese coffee shop chain Komeda Coffee. The sign for Komeda Coffee features a turtle—*kame* means "turtle" in Japanese.

PAGE 93
"What is this sadness in my heart? Where is it leading me?" are lyrics from the song "Seventh Moon," the opening theme to the 1994 science fiction anime *Macross 7*. The song is sung by Yoshiki Fukuyama, the singing voice of *Macross 7* protagonist Basara Nekki. In the anime, Basara is a rock musician who uses a combination of his own personal giant robot, his passion for music, and a strong pacifist stance to change the world.

PAGE 97
"Nisemono no koi" can be shortened to *Nisekoi*, a romantic comedy manga that ran in the magazine *Weekly Shounen Jump*. The series is about the children of rival organized crime families who decide to fake a relationship in order to keep their two families in an uneasy truce. Utaha is preventing Tomoya from actually saying the title out loud.

PAGE 97
Ahegao ("panting face") is an expression supposedly made when a girl is overwhelmed with sexual pleasure. Combined with the double peace sign (which implies exhibitionism) and tanned skin (which suggests sexual promiscuity), *ahegao* is commonly seen in Japanese erotic anime, manga, and games as an indication of a girl succumbing to unbridled lust, moral depravity, and/or unfaithfulness.

PAGE 101
"The destruction of our community" is a fourth wall-breaking reference to an online community's decline from prominence. Megumi's line about being "happy with how things are" supposedly ruins the romantic speculation aspect of the series.

PAGE 113
The **crossface chickenwing** is a professional wrestling submission hold that targets the neck and shoulders. It is most commonly associated with the wrestler Bob Backlund, the second-longest reigning world heavyweight champion in World Wrestling Entertainment history (then known as the World Wide Wrestling Federation), as well as a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) amateur wrestling champion.

TRANSLATION NOTES

PAGE 119
The Nasu Highland, located in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan, is a large plateau that is littered with vacation homes and Japanese inns. Its attractions include a teddy bear museum and a monkey park.

PAGE 120
"Believe in me, who you believe in!" is a twist on a famous line from the 2007 giant robot anime *Gurren Lagann*. In it, the character Kamina tries to motivate the character Simon by telling him, "Believe in me, who believes in you!"

PAGE 125
"Why do I feel this vague sense of unease?" is a reference to the suicide letter of Japanese author Ryuunosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927), who is considered one of the greatest writers in Japanese literature. In his final letter, Akutagawa mentions feeling insecure about the future. The Akutagawa Prize, Japan's highest literary award, is named after him.

PAGE 125
● Centimeters Per Second, or *5 Centimeters Per Second*, is a 2007 Japanese animated film directed by Makoto Shinkai. Divided into three episodes, it tells the story of love and relationships that grow further apart due to the increasing physical and emotional distance between its characters. The title is a reference to the speed at which a cherry blossom petal falls, with cherry blossoms symbolizing ephemerality in Japanese culture.

PAGE 125
The **main theme** of *5 Centimeters Per Second* is "One More Time, One More Chance" by Masayoshi Yamazaki, a melancholy song whose tune is affecting Tomoya emotionally.

PAGE 130
The **grand route** is the final playable path in visual novels and dating sims. Although there are no hard and fast rules for what comprises a grand route, common aspects include being only available once all other endings have been obtained and being the part where the greatest secrets in the game's story are revealed.

PAGE 130
Pe●●●ng is a reference to Peyoung, a brand of Japanese instant *yakisoba*. Peyoung comes in a variety of flavors, including exotic ones such as peperoncino and chocolate.

PAGE 134
Onii-chan is a cute and affectionate way of saying "big brother" in Japanese.

PAGE 149
Rokutenba Mall is based on Mitsui Outlet Park Iruma, an outlet mall in the city of Iruma in Saitama Prefecture.

PAGE 157
"I saw the sea today. I'm not afraid anymore." references a similar line from the 1999 visual novel *Kana: Little Sister* by D.O. about a high school boy named Takamichi, who takes care of his sickly younger sister, Kana, and falls in love with her. The line, spoken by Kana, comes after Takamichi takes her to view the sea—a wish she thought would never be fulfilled—giving her the resolve to face the future even as she knows she won't live long. *Kana: Little Sister* is influential among Japanese *otaku* for its tragic narrative and the fact that the game, while containing sex scenes, de-emphasizes them. Eriri uses the finality of this line to tease Tomoya.

TRANSLATION NOTES

PAGE 165

A **shrine maiden**, or *miko*, was historically a female shaman whose responsibilities included performing exorcisms and acting as spirit mediums at Shinto shrines in Japan. Today, their roles include acting as shrine receptionists, and they may be involved in a variety of rituals such as weddings and festivals. Their outfits traditionally do not include short skirts—that is purely for *otaku* appeal.

How to Raise a Boring Girlfriend

HOW TO RAISE A BORING GIRLFRIEND ❻

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